



Bologna Promoters' Training Seminar on Quality Assurance in Europe

READER



Education and Culture

prepared with



INTRODUCTION

This Reader was prepared for the Bologna Promoters' Training Seminar on Quality Assurance in Europe (22-23 November 2006, Technical University of Munich, Germany). The training seminar is organised in the framework of the **Information Project on Higher Education Reform** managed by the European University Association (EUA) on behalf of the European Commission.

The Reader represents a collection of key texts adopted and agreements reached at the European level on the topic of Quality Assurance. It also includes references to other relevant material on the websites mentioned.

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Official Bologna Texts

Quality Assurance in the Ministerial Communiqués

Excerpts from the Bologna, Prague, Berlin and Bergen Communiqués

European Quality Assurance Standards

In Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE MINISTERIAL DECLARATIONS AND COMMUNIQUÉS

- **BOLOGNA DECLARATION - 1999**

'While affirming our support to the general principles laid down in the Sorbonne declaration, we engage in co-ordinating our policies to reach in the short term, and in any case within the first decade of the third millennium, the following objectives, which we consider to be of primary relevance in order to establish the European area of higher education and to promote the European system of higher education world-wide: ... Promotion of **European co-operation in quality assurance** with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies...'

- **PRAGUE COMMUNIQUÉ - 2001**

'Promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance

Ministers recognized the vital role that quality assurance systems play in ensuring high quality standards and in facilitating the comparability of qualifications throughout Europe. They also encouraged closer cooperation between recognition and quality assurance networks. **They emphasized the necessity of close European cooperation and mutual trust in and acceptance of national quality assurance systems.** Further they encouraged universities and other higher education institutions to disseminate examples of best practice and to design scenarios for mutual acceptance of evaluation and accreditation/certification mechanisms. Ministers called upon the universities and other higher education institutions, national agencies and the European Network of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), in cooperation with corresponding bodies from countries which are not members of ENQA, to collaborate in establishing a common framework of reference and to disseminate best practice.'

'...Ministers also pointed out that **quality is the basic underlying condition for trust, relevance, mobility, compatibility and attractiveness in the European Higher Education Area.**'

- **BERLIN COMMUNIQUÉ 2003**

'Ministers emphasise the importance of all elements of the Bologna Process for establishing the European Higher Education Area and stress the need to intensify the efforts at institutional, national and European level. However, to give the Process further momentum, they commit themselves to **intermediate priorities** for the next two years. They will strengthen their efforts to promote **effective quality assurance systems**, to step up effective use of the system based on two cycles and to improve the recognition system of degrees and periods of studies.'

'Quality Assurance

The quality of higher education has proven to be at the heart of the setting up of a European Higher Education Area. Ministers commit themselves to supporting further development of quality assurance at institutional, national and European level. They stress the need to develop mutually shared criteria and methodologies on quality assurance. They also stress that consistent with the principle of institutional autonomy, **the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself and this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework.** Therefore, they agree that by 2005 national quality assurance systems should include:

- A definition of the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved.

- Evaluation of programmes or institutions, including internal assessment, external review, participation of students and the publication of results.
- A system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures.
- International participation, co-operation and networking.

At the European level, Ministers call upon ENQA through its members, in co-operation with the EUA, EURASHE and ESIB, **to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance**, to explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer review system for quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies or bodies, and to report back through the Follow-up Group to Ministers in 2005. Due account will be taken of the expertise of other quality assurance associations and networks.'

- **BERGEN COMMUNIQUÉ 2005**

'Quality assurance

Almost all countries have made provision for a quality assurance system based on the criteria set out in the Berlin Communiqué and with a high degree of cooperation and networking. However, there is still progress to be made, in particular as regards student involvement and international cooperation. **Furthermore, we urge higher education institutions to continue their efforts to enhance the quality of their activities through the systematic introduction of internal mechanisms and their direct correlation to external quality assurance.** We adopt the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area as proposed by ENQA. **We commit ourselves to introducing the proposed model for peer review of quality assurance agencies on a national basis, while respecting the commonly accepted guidelines and criteria.** We welcome the principle of a European register of quality assurance agencies based on national review. We ask that the practicalities of implementation be further developed by ENQA in cooperation with EUA, EURASHE and ESIB with a report back to us through the Follow-up Group. **We underline the importance of cooperation between nationally recognised agencies with a view to enhancing the mutual recognition of accreditation or quality assurance decisions.'**

'Our contribution to achieving education for all should be based on the principle of sustainable development and be in accordance with the ongoing international work on developing guidelines for **quality provision of cross-border higher education.**'

EUROPEAN QUALITY ASSURANCE STANDARDS

The Bergen Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education 19-20 May 2005 adopted Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. The standards are given here for easy reference. **The complete set of standards and guidelines are given in the ENQA report *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* that is included in the participants' bag.**

A. EUROPEAN STANDARDS FOR INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE WITHIN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

1. *Policy and procedures for quality assurance:*

Institutions should have a policy and associated procedures for the assurance of the quality and standards of their programmes and awards. They should also commit themselves explicitly to the development of a culture which recognises the importance of quality, and quality assurance, in their work. To achieve this, institutions should develop and implement a strategy for the continuous enhancement of quality. The strategy, policy and procedures should have a formal status and be publicly available. They should also include a role for students and other stakeholders.

2. *Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards:*

Institutions should have formal mechanisms for the approval, periodic review and monitoring of their programmes and awards.

3. *Assessment of students:*

Students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied consistently.

4. *Quality assurance of teaching staff:*

Institutions should have ways of satisfying themselves that staff involved in the teaching of students are qualified and competent with regard to teaching. The methods and procedures for ensuring that this is the case should be available to those undertaking external reviews, and commented upon in reports.

5. *Learning resources and student support:*

Institutions should ensure that the resources available for the support of student learning are adequate and appropriate for each programme offered.

6. *Information systems:*

Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes of study and other activities.

7. *Public information:*

Institutions should regularly publish up-to-date, impartial and objective information, both quantitative and qualitative, about the programmes and awards they are offering.

B. EUROPEAN STANDARDS FOR THE EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

1. *Use of internal quality assurance procedures:*

External quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part A above.

2. *Development of external quality assurance processes:*

The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.

3. *Criteria for decisions:*

Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently.

4. *Processes fit for purpose:*

All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.

5. *Reporting:*

Reports should be published and should be written in a style which is clear and readily accessible to their intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find.

6. *Follow-up procedures:*

Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently.

7. *Periodic reviews:*

External quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance.

8. *System-wide analyses:*

Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments etc.

C. EUROPEAN STANDARDS FOR EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES

1. *Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education:*

The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part B above.

2. *Official status:*

Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.

3. *Activities:*

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis.

4. *Resources:*

Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures.

5. *Mission statement:*

Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.

6. *Independence:*

Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

7. *External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies:*

The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available. These processes will normally be expected to include:

1. a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process;
2. an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency;
3. publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes;
4. a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.

8. *Accountability procedures:*

Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.

EU Policy

Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education (2006)

Quality Labels

Excerpt from the Commission Staff working document 'From Bergen to London: The EU Contribution'

II

(Acts whose publication is not obligatory)

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND COUNCIL

RECOMMENDATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL

of 15 February 2006

on further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education

(2006/143/EC)

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, and in particular Articles 149(4) and 150(4) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the Commission,

Having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee ⁽¹⁾,

After consulting the Committee of the Regions,

Acting in accordance with the procedure laid down in Article 251 of the Treaty ⁽²⁾,

Whereas:

(1) Although the implementation of Council Recommendation 98/561/EC of 24 September 1998 on European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education ⁽³⁾ has been a marked success as demonstrated in the report of the Commission of 30 September 2004, there is still a need to improve the performance of European higher

education, particularly as regards quality, in order for it to become more transparent and trustworthy for European citizens and for students and scholars from other continents.

- (2) Recommendation 98/561/EC called for support to and, where necessary, the establishment of transparent quality assurance systems. Almost all Member States have set up national assurance systems and have initiated or enabled the establishment of one or more quality assurance or accreditation agencies.
- (3) Recommendation 98/561/EC called for quality assurance systems to be based on a series of essential features, including evaluation of programmes or institutions through internal assessment, external review, and involving the participation of students, publication of results and international participation. The results of quality assurance assessments play a significant role in helping higher education institutions to improve performance.
- (4) The essential features referred to in recital 3 have generally been implemented in all quality assurance systems and they have been affirmed by the European Ministers of Education, in Berlin, in September 2003, in the context of the Bologna Process, working towards the realisation of a European Higher Education Area.
- (5) The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) was established in 2000 and has a growing membership of quality assurance or accreditation agencies in all Member States.

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 255, 14.10.2005, p. 72.

⁽²⁾ Opinion of the European Parliament of 13 October 2005 (not yet published in the Official Journal) and Council Decision of 30 January 2006.

⁽³⁾ OJ L 270, 7.10.1998, p. 56.

(6) In the context of the Bologna Process, Ministers of Education from 45 countries adopted the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area, as proposed by ENQA, during their meeting in Bergen on 19 and 20 May 2005 and as a

follow-up to the meeting in Berlin in September 2003. They also welcomed the principle of a European register of quality assurance agencies based on national review and asked that the practicalities of implementation be further developed by ENQA, in cooperation with the European University Association (EUA), the European Association for Institutions of Higher Education (EUR-ASHE) and the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB), with a report back to Ministers through the Bologna Follow-up Group. They furthermore underlined the importance of cooperation between nationally recognised agencies with a view to enhancing the mutual recognition of accreditation or quality assurance decisions.

- (7) EU action supporting quality assurance should be developed in coherence with activities carried out in the context of the Bologna Process.
- (8) It is desirable to draw up a register of independent and trustworthy quality assurance agencies operating in Europe, be they regional or national, general or specialised, public or private, to support transparency in higher education and help the recognition of qualifications and periods of study abroad.
- (9) In the context of the Lisbon Strategy, the European Council in Barcelona, in March 2002, expressed their conclusion that European education and training systems should become a 'world quality reference',

HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT MEMBER STATES:

1. encourage all higher education institutions active within their territory to introduce or develop rigorous internal quality assurance systems, in accordance with the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area adopted in Bergen in the context of the Bologna Process;
2. encourage all quality assurance or accreditation agencies active within their territory to be independent in their assessments, to apply the features of quality assurance laid down in Recommendation 98/561/EC and to apply the common set of general standards and guidelines adopted in Bergen, for assessment purposes. These standards should be further developed in cooperation with representatives of the higher education sector. They should be applied in such a way as to protect and promote diversity and innovation;
3. encourage representatives of national authorities, the higher education sector and quality assurance and

accreditation agencies, together with social partners, to set up a 'European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies' (European Register) based on national review, that takes account of the principles set out in the Annex, and to define the conditions for registration and the rules for management of the register;

4. enable higher education institutions active within their territory to choose among quality assurance or accreditation agencies in the European Register an agency which meets their needs and profile, provided that this is compatible with their national legislation or permitted by their national authorities;
5. allow higher education institutions to work towards a complementary assessment by another agency in the European Register, for example to enhance their international reputation;
6. promote cooperation between agencies in order to build up mutual trust and the recognition of quality assurance and accreditation assessments, thus contributing to the recognition of qualifications for the purpose of study or work in another country;
7. ensure public access to the assessments made by the quality assurance or accreditation agencies listed in the European Register,

INVITE THE COMMISSION:

1. to continue, in close cooperation with the Member States, its support for cooperation between higher education institutions, quality assurance and accreditation agencies, competent authorities and other bodies active in the field;
2. to present triennial reports to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on progress in the development of quality assurance systems in the various Member States and on cooperation activities at European level, including the progress achieved with respect to the objectives referred to above.

Done at Strasbourg, 15 February 2006.

For the European Parliament

The President

J. BORRELL FONTELLES

For the Council

The President

H. WINKLER

ANNEX

'European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies'

The Register should provide a list of reliable agencies whose assessments Member States (and public authorities within Member States) can trust. It should be founded on the following main principles.

1. The list of agencies should be drawn up by representatives of national authorities, the higher education sector (higher education institutions, students, teachers and researchers) and quality assurance and accreditation agencies active in the Member States, together with social partners.
 2. Conditions for registration of agencies could include, *inter alia*:
 - (i) a commitment to complete independence in reaching their judgement;
 - (ii) recognition by at least the Member State within which they operate (or by public authorities within that Member State);
 - (iii) operation on the basis of the common set of standards and guidelines referred to in recommendations 1 and 2 addressed to the Member State;
 - (iv) regular external review by peers and other experts, including publication of the criteria, methodologies and results of such review.
 3. In the event of an initial refusal of registration, re-evaluation is possible on the basis of improvements made.
-

FROM BERGEN TO LONDON
The EU Contribution

Quality labels

Most evaluation and accreditation is carried out on a national or regional basis. It is expected that these local exercises will become more comparable and more European through the use of European standards and guidelines and the involvement of foreign experts. In a limited number of cases, there is scope for transnational evaluation and accreditation. For instance in highly internationalised fields of study like engineering or business studies or in cases where universities or sponsors (public or private) seek to obtain a label for reasons of branding or consumer protection. Integrated study programmes, like joint masters, obviously require a collaborative effort of the respective quality assurance agencies.

The Commission supports the setting up and testing phase of transnational quality evaluation. Two European quality labels were launched in March 2006 (engineering and chemistry). Four new labels will be tested in 2006/2007 and launched in 2007/2008 (engineering, chemistry, business studies, music, e-learning, life sciences and rural environment and informatics).

Quality labels will have to prove their added value to the universities, students, employers and public authorities. They are expected to apply for the European and would be assessed against the same rigorous criteria as any other applying quality assurance agency, be it national or international, public or private.

Policy Papers from Stakeholders

EUA Glasgow Declaration - Strong Universities for a Strong Europe (2005)

EUA QA policy position in the context of the Berlin Communiqué (2004)

ESIB Statement on peer review of Quality Assurance and Accreditation agencies (2004)

ESIB Statement on agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines at a European level (2004)

ESIB Policy Paper on Quality Assurance and Accreditation - Improving Quality and Promoting Mobility (2003)

ENQA Statement to the Conference of European Education Ministers in Berlin (2003)

INQAAHE Policy Statement (2004)

EUA GLASGOW DECLARATION

STRONG UNIVERSITIES FOR A STRONG EUROPE

I. PREAMBLE

1. The Glasgow Declaration provides the basis for a continued high level policy dialogue between universities – in the broadest sense - and public authorities which was called for in Glasgow by Commission President José Manuel Barroso in order to secure, as one of Europe's top priorities, the future of Europe's universities.
2. The Glasgow Declaration sets out actions which will ensure that universities make their full contribution to building Europe as a major player in a global environment. This Action Agenda follows on from the work begun by EUA in Salamanca (2001) and in Graz (2003).
3. Europe needs strong and creative universities as key actors in shaping the European knowledge society through their commitment to wide participation and lifelong learning, and by their promotion of quality and excellence in teaching, learning, research and innovation activities.
4. This will be achieved by self-confident institutions able to determine their own development and to contribute to social, cultural and economic well-being at regional, national, European and global level.
5. Universities are committed to improving their governing structures and leadership competence so as to increase their efficiency and innovative capacity and to achieve their multiple missions.

II. MISSION AND VALUES FOR STRONG INSTITUTIONS

6. Universities' multiple missions involve the creation, preservation, evaluation, dissemination and exploitation of knowledge. Strong universities require strong academic and social values that underlie their contributions to society. Universities share a commitment to the social underpinning of economic growth and the ethical dimensions of higher education and research.
7. Universities are developing differentiated missions and profiles to address the challenges of global competition while maintaining a commitment to access and social cohesion. Diversification and greater competition are balanced by inter-institutional cooperation based on a shared commitment to quality.
8. Inter-institutional cooperation has been the hallmark of Europe's universities and is increasingly important in a globalised and competitive environment. Universities acknowledge that European integration must be accompanied by strengthened international cooperation based on a community of interests.
9. Universities are open to working with society. Institutional autonomy and mission diversity are essential prerequisites for ensuring effective engagement.

III. THE POLICY FRAMEWORK - THE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

10. Universities have demonstrated the inextricable linkage between implementing the Bologna reforms and meeting the research and innovation goals of the Lisbon Agenda. These two policy agendas urgently need to be viewed together in order for each to be successful in the long term.
11. Recognising this common research and higher education agenda implies rethinking the role of governments in their relation to universities. Governments must emphasise trust and empowerment, provide incentives in order to support and steer the higher education sector and concentrate on a supervisory rather than a regulatory role.

12. The importance of investment in education, innovation and research in meeting the Lisbon goals, and the central role of universities, means that policy discussions between universities and national authorities should take place with governments as a whole as well as at individual ministerial level.

IV. REFOCUSING THE BOLOGNA PROCESS MIDWAY TO 2010

13. Bologna reforms are refocusing on higher education institutions, now that the legislative framework is largely in place. Universities willingly accept their responsibility to drive forward implementation in the next five years and urge governments to accept that the process needs time, and financial and human resources, to ensure long-term sustainability.
14. Universities commit to redoubling their efforts to introduce innovative teaching methods, to reorient curricula in a dialogue with employers and to take up the challenge of academic and professional education, lifelong learning and recognition of prior learning. Governments are urged to give universities the autonomy they need to introduce the agreed reforms.
15. In order to enhance the acceptance of first cycle qualifications, governments should take the lead by restructuring public sector career paths accordingly.
16. Universities commit to increasing their efforts to promote student centred learning, to introduce learning outcomes in curricular design, to implement ECTS and to ensure the flexible adoption of modularisation. Governments should include universities in the continuing efforts to develop national and European qualifications frameworks. These must be sufficiently broad and transparent to promote institutional innovation and be given time in order to be developed adequately and to agree on a common terminology.
17. In refocusing the Bologna Process universities undertake to give a higher priority to the social dimension as a fundamental commitment, to develop policies in order to increase and widen opportunities for access and support to under-represented groups, and to promote research in order to inform policy and target actions to address inequality in higher education systems. Governments are called upon to remove legal obstacles to implementing these policies.
18. Providing incentives for the mobility of students in all cycles, as well as that of academic and administrative staff, is crucial. EUA advocates European funding schemes that target students with the greatest financial needs. Universities should exploit opportunities offered by existing networks and cooperation schemes. Governments are urged to solve such issues as restrictive visa, internship and labour-market regulations that impede student and staff exchange, including those arising from social security and in particular pension arrangements. The question of the synchronisation of academic calendars must be addressed.
19. To meet these commitments, universities underline the importance of the involvement of students as full partners in the process and will seek to reinforce this partnership in the future.
20. Universities will reinforce the European dimension in a variety of ways, e.g., benchmarking curricula, developing joint degrees using European tools, enhancing intercultural and multilingual skills. Universities call on governments to ensure that remaining barriers to the development of joint degrees are removed and that appropriate language policies are in place, starting at the school level.

V. ENHANCING RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

21. Universities assume their responsibility for providing a broad research-based education to students at all levels in response to society's growing need for scientific and technological information and understanding.
22. Universities must exercise their own responsibilities for enhancing research and innovation through the optimal use of resources and the development of institutional research strategies. Their diverse profiles ensure that they are increasingly engaged in the research and innovation process, working with different partners.

23. Universities strongly support the establishment of the European Research Council (ERC) for the enhancement of the quality and excellence of European research and call on national governments and the EC to establish it rapidly within the Seventh Framework Programme. Following identified good practices in several European countries and in the Sixth Framework Programme, governments should be aware of the need to open up and coordinate national funding.
24. Universities accept that there is a tension between the necessary strengthening of research universities and the need to ensure resources for research-based teaching in all universities. Governments are called upon to recognise the particular role of universities as essential nodes in networks promoting innovation and transfer at regional level and to make the necessary financial support available to strengthen this process.

VI. RESEARCH TRAINING AND RESEARCHER CAREERS

25. The design of doctoral programmes will ensure: that while the central element of doctoral programmes remains the advancement of knowledge through research, doctoral training will meet the needs of an employment market that is wider than academia, through the development of research competence and transferable skills; that doctoral programmes correspond to three to four years full time work; that joint transnational doctoral programmes are strengthened, and that doctoral candidates are considered both as students and as early stage researchers with commensurate rights.
26. Universities welcome the adoption of the “European Charter for Researchers/Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers” and emphasise their key role in the dialogue on the enhancement of research careers in Europe, not least in order to avoid ‘brain drain’.

VII. QUALITY FOR STRONG INSTITUTIONS

27. Universities stress the link between a systematic quality culture, the scope of autonomy and funding levels, and call on governments to acknowledge that greater autonomy and adequate funding levels are essential to raising the overall quality of Europe’s universities.
28. Universities are committed to developing, embedding and mainstreaming an internal quality culture that fits their institutional mission and objectives. This commitment is demonstrated by the growing numbers of institutions involved in EUA’s quality related activities. Universities are convinced that legitimacy of and confidence in external quality assurance procedures derive from a partnership among all stakeholders (students, universities, national authorities) and a shared agreement on these procedures, their goals and follow-up.
29. Universities advocate a balance between autonomy and accountability through institutional audit procedures which: embody a fitness for purpose approach that is culturally adapted to countries and institutions and in line with their different missions and profiles; are aimed at strategic improvement and change rather than quality control; and are designed to develop a European dimension through European evaluation teams and to take into account engagement with society and commitment to the social dimension of the Bologna Process.
30. Universities are committed to a dialogue and a partnership, at European level in the “E4” (comprising ENQA, ESIB, EUA and EURASHE) in order to enhance accountability procedures that would strengthen the overall quality of Europe’s universities. EUA supports the ENQA report for Bergen, including the standards and guidelines for quality assurance, the establishment of a European register of quality assurance agencies and the European Register Committee.

VIII. FUNDING FOR STRONG INSTITUTIONS

31. Europe’s universities are not sufficiently funded and cannot be expected to compete with other systems without comparable levels of funding. At present, EU countries spend about half of the proportion of their GDP on universities compared to the United States. While Europe’s Lisbon goals are ambitious, public funding for research and higher education is stagnating at best. Universities maintain that weakened public support erodes their role in sustaining

democracy and their capacity for promoting cultural, social and technological innovation. Governments must ensure appropriate levels of funding to maintain and raise the quality of institutions.

32. Universities are working to diversify their funding streams. They are committed to exploring combined public/private funding models and to launching a structured and evidenced-based discussion within EUA and with stakeholders. They will develop full economic cost models and call on governments to allocate funds accordingly.
33. In the interests of accountability and transparency universities are committed to explore good practice and to reinforce leadership and strengthen professional management.

IX. CONCLUSION

34. Universities intend to shape the strategic debate on their role within the Europe of Knowledge. Universities call on governments to view higher education and research budgets as an *investment in the future*. Universities welcome the dialogue that started in Glasgow at the highest European political level and convey the message that a strong Europe needs strong universities.

EUA, Brussels, 15 April 2005

EUA QA POLICY POSITION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE BERLIN COMMUNIQUÉ

12 April 2004

INTRODUCTION

The following policy paper develops further the EUA's QA position (Graz Declaration) in the context of the QA action lines of the Berlin Communiqué. Specifically, the Berlin Communiqué:

- ⌚ Recognises the role of HEIs in promoting quality (this constitutes the first official acknowledgement in the context of the Bologna process)
- ⌚ Invites ENQA, in co-operation with EUA, ESIB and EURASHE,
 - A. to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance
 - B. to explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer-review system for QA & A agencies.

This paper presents a discussion on the first policy line of the Berlin Communiqué, which has been endorsed by the EUA Council on 1 April 2004. The EUA position paper on the second line of the Berlin Communiqué will be presented to the Council during a consultation period (20 April – 20 May 2004) and will be circulated to the EUA membership shortly thereafter.

I. QUALITY AND STANDARDS

In discussions that EUA held with various stakeholders and members, it has become clear that the word "Standard" in the Berlin Communiqué is open to interpretation. Some understand that standards must refer to QA procedures and others argue that they refer to higher education institutions. Based on the discussions in the Bologna Follow-up Group and on the following considerations (cf. 1.1 – 1.3 below), EUA believes that the "standards, procedures and guidelines" were meant to refer to quality assurance. This is the perspective adopted in this paper and the following three points explain the rationale for this approach.

1.1 EUA strongly believes that it is important for the Bologna process to be articulated with the Lisbon objectives. In this perspective, it is difficult to see how a broad use of "standards" that would be applied to higher education institutions would allow Europe to reach the objectives of becoming the most competitive knowledge society in the world. This ambitious objective requires a diverse and innovative HE sector across the continent, as the current national debates show (e.g., France, Germany, Ireland, UK). In risking to stifle diversity and innovation in the sector, standards would constitute a threat to reaching the Lisbon objectives.

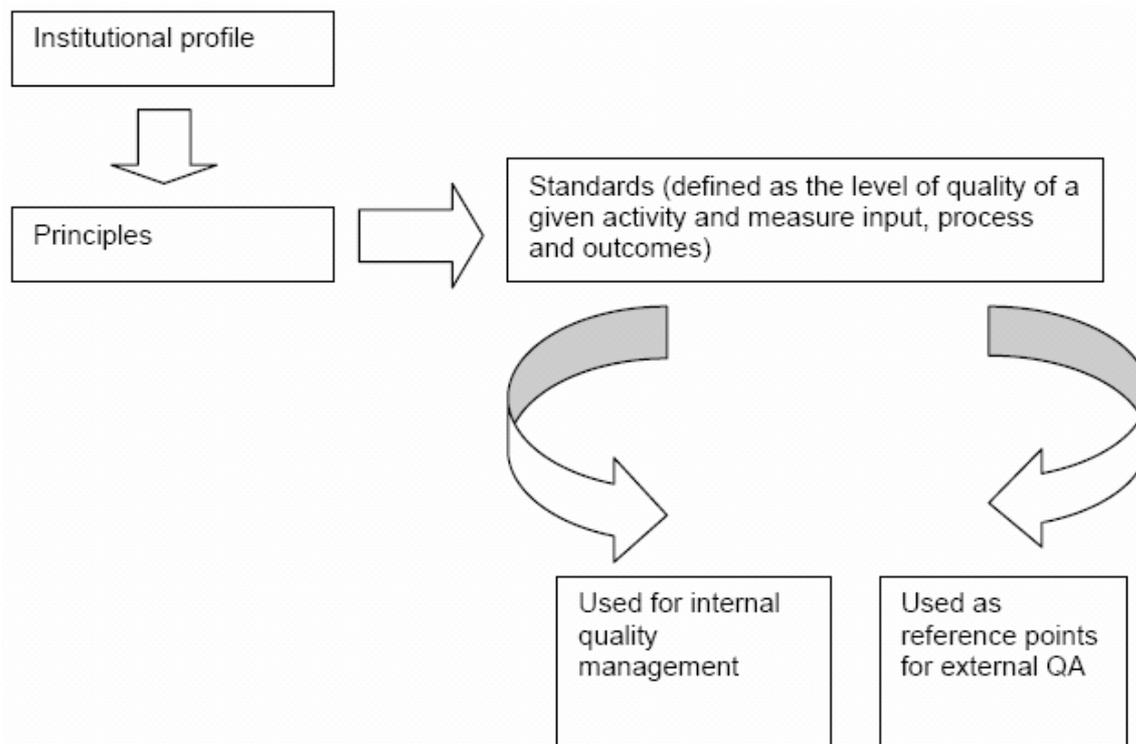
2.2 The Institutional Evaluation Programme has given EUA a solid experience in transnational evaluation, one that is unmatched anywhere in Europe and the world. EUA has evaluated close to 120 universities in 35 different countries. This ten-year experience, combined with the outcomes of the Quality Culture project, points to the fact that it is impossible to reach agreement on quality standards when dealing with a diversity of institutions across a whole continent.

3.3 Higher education institutions are characterised by a diffused and devolved power structure, complex and somewhat ambiguous goals, and outcomes that are difficult to measure or quantify. In this respect, we may well ponder the astute observation of Martin Trow, a distinguished professor of education at the University of California (Berkeley), who noted that "The real and substantial effects of the experience of higher education extend over the whole lifetime of graduates, and are inextricably entwined with other forces and experiences beyond the walls and the reach of universities" (Trow 1996). Martin Trow recommends that evaluations focus on the capacity for higher education

institutions to change: “How an institution responds to change points to deep-seated qualities of the unit which must also show up in its research and teaching.” (Trow 1994)¹.

This observation suggests that:

- ⌚ Evaluation approaches that are based on standards, quantitative methods, sets of criteria, or checklists will not improve quality meaningfully and may not even control it significantly because they will not capture the complexity of the educational enterprise.
- ⌚ Autonomy is a precondition for a capacity to respond to change. Thus, university autonomy requires that each institution decides on its standards in the context of its mission and goals. As the following graph illustrates²:



II. POLICY GOALS

As discussed at the EUA Graz Convention (May 2003), the **policy goals** for an appropriate European QA dimension are:

- ⌚ *Achieve greater compatibility while managing diversity of QA & A procedures:*

There is a great diversity of national procedures in Europe that needs to be accepted as this diversity reflects specific national circumstances that each national QA framework tries to address. Upholding a widely shared set of standards in the QA area would ensure compatibility while minimising intrusiveness in national frameworks.

- ⌚ *Achieve trust:*

It is evident from discussions with various key actors, that some believe that trust across Europe can be achieved only if all QA & A agencies follow similar procedures and guidelines.

¹ Trow, Martin, 1994, “Academic reviews and the culture of excellence, 1994, reprinted in *Quality Management in Higher Education Institutions*, Lemma Publisher, Utrecht, The Netherlands, 1999. Trow, Martin, 1996, “Trust, Markets and Accountability in Higher Education: A Comprehensive Perspective”, in SRHE, *The 30th Anniversary seminars*.

² Frans Van Vught, presentation at the EUA Seminar on the QA lines of the Berlin Communiqué, University of Zurich, 26 February 2004, funded by the Swiss Confederation.

EUA contends that trust emanates from the way in which and the spirit with which QA procedures and guidelines are carried out rather than simply in having a similar protocol of procedures or set of guidelines. In other words, trust is based on professionalism, grounded in a set of standards.

- ⌚ *Promote innovative and dynamic institutions in a context characterised by diversity of missions, goals and curricula:*

The Berlin Communiqué refers to “standards of QA procedures”. Section III below details what these standards might be. It is important to note that the proposed set of six standards is applicable to QA & A as indicated by the wording of the Berlin Communiqué (cf. Section I above for a fuller discussion of this point).

- ⌚ *Preserve and extend institutional autonomy while meeting the demands for accountability:*

It is essential that the development of a European QA dimension accompanies and extends institutional autonomy in order to ensure that QA & A is not merely window-dressing and a compliance exercise. The Berlin Communiqué acknowledges the central role that institutions must play in this respect.

- ⌚ *Avoid a big bureaucracy, burdensome QA & A mechanisms and promote cost-effective QA & A procedures.*

Care must be taken that funds are not wasted on complex bureaucratic arrangements or on QA & A procedures that put an undue drain on human and financial resources.

- ⌚ *Ensure the role of the HE sector in any future monitoring scheme:*

Given the emphasis placed by the Berlin Communiqué regarding the role of higher education institutions in promoting quality, it is essential that the sector plays a role in any future monitoring scheme in order to guarantee that academic core values are upheld and, most importantly, to ensure the adhesion of the academic community.

III. STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES ON QUALITY ASSURANCE

EUA members discussed in Graz a code of principles. These principles are retained in this document but are now called “standards” to use the wordings of the Berlin Communiqué. To each “standard” corresponds a set of “Procedures” and “Guidelines”.

This section identifies a set of standards, procedures and guidelines, which are defined as follows:

- ⌚ **Standards** state the principles and values that need to be upheld
- ⌚ **Procedures** identify the protocols used by external QA & A agencies to meet the standards
- ⌚ **Guidelines** refer to reference points by which to evaluate if the standards are met

From the policy goals established above, EUA derives the following six standards and associated sets of procedures and guidelines for QA & A.

STANDARD 1: QA & A procedures will promote institutional autonomy and diversity and foster innovation by evaluating institutions against their mission and strategic plans.

Procedure 1-1: QA & A will be based on a fitness for purpose approach and will evaluate against the specific mission and goals of an institution.

Procedure 1-2: QA & A will start with an understanding of the legal scope of institutional autonomy, including funding arrangements and staff management issues in order to grasp what latitude the institutions has in its operations.

Procedure 1-3: QA & A will assess the capacity of an institution to innovate by examining its decision-making processes and its ability for mid- and long-term strategic planning to assess the degree to which these are effective and efficient.

Guideline 1-A: Recommendations will be based on a fitness for purpose approach while questioning, where appropriate, the fitness of objectives in terms of their feasibility and desirability (i.e., both fitness for and of purpose will be examined).

Guideline 1-B: Recommendations will encourage institutions to take full advantage of their autonomy and, in cases where the legal framework is too restrictive, to make suggestions to enlarge this scope.

Guideline 1-C: Recommendations will promote innovative institutions by making specific suggestions to improve strategic planning capacity.

Guideline 1-D: Recommendations will take into account the financial resources and the funding arrangement of the institution in order to assess if preconditions are met to support its capacity for long-term planning and innovation.

STANDARD 2: QA & A procedures will promote organisational quality

Procedure 2-1: Organisational quality refers to sound management and decision-making processes. Their evaluation will be anchored in an understanding of the complexity of functions and the collegial tradition of higher education. In other words, organisational quality of higher education institutions will (i) balance the need for efficiency with the requirements associated with public service and (ii) take into account both the relative flat hierarchy that characterises higher education institutions (where knowledge and expertise are distributed throughout the organisation) and their need to build a community through collegial decision-making.

Guideline 2-A: Recommendations will address the extent to which institutions meet the need for efficiency in appropriate areas (e.g., in the administrative line, business ventures, health and safety, management of equipment and buildings).

Guideline 2-B: Recommendations will address the extent to which institutions are serving students and the public through an examination of such issues as access and diversity and links to the local and regional community.

Guideline 2-C: Recommendations will address the extent to which collegiality and community building are promoted through an internal communication strategy and participation in decision-making processes.

Guideline 2-D: Recommendations will address the balance between centralised and decentralised decision-making processes (i.e., the remit of rectorate vs. deans and department heads) and will address such issues as the clarity of responsibility and accountability of the various actors, the use of appropriate staff development schemes and feedback loop of internal quality monitoring into the decision-making process.

STANDARD 3: QA & A procedures will be geared at enhancement, which means that they will prompt institutions to develop internal quality measures and will emphasise self-evaluation as a key step in the procedure.

Procedure 3-1: The self-evaluation phase is an essential element in QA & A procedures and will be viewed as a collective opportunity for the institution to develop further its capacity for self-reflection and an internal quality culture.

Procedure 3-2: Internal quality monitoring will include the evaluation of all activities and programmes on a cyclical basis and be characterised by an understanding of quality standards that is widely shared across the institution.

Guideline 3-A: The QA & A agency has guidelines for the self-evaluation and offers training and support to institutions engaged in this process.

Guideline 3-B: The evaluation/accreditation report will be based on a self-evaluation report and will assess how successful the self-evaluation process was in bringing the institution together to reflect upon institutional strengths and weaknesses and its capacity to develop recommendations for improvement.

Guideline 3-C: Internal quality will not be viewed merely as a set of technical and managerial procedures but as a means to promote organisational quality through a proper embedding of a quality culture.

Guideline 3-D: Recommendations will address the extent to which a culture of quality and a common set of standards are shared across the institution.

STANDARD 4: QA & A procedures will assure public accountability by including stakeholders in the process, communicating the results to the public and be independent, in terms of their outcomes, of governments, interest groups and individual higher education institutions.

Procedure 4-1: The external panel will be assembled according to the following principles: expertise, objectivity and fairness. The institution being evaluated will have a right of veto on any panel member who is deemed to have a conflict of interest. The institution, however, will not have the opportunity to nominate experts on the external panels.

Procedure 4-2: The external panel will be given appropriate training to understand the procedures and scope of the evaluation and be sensitised to its ethical aspects.

Procedure 4-3: The site visit programme will be agreed between the external panel and the institution (with input from the QA & A agency) and include discussions with all the key groups in the institution (e.g., leadership, students, academic and administrative staff) and external stakeholders. The institution, however, shall not dictate the programme of the site visit.

Procedure 4-4: The external panel will produce a public report autonomously from the institution and the QA & A agency. The institution has the right to correct factual errors. In case of accreditation, the decision of the panel will be respected by the accreditation agency and the national authority.

Guideline 4-A: The QA & A agency has developed a code of ethics to ensure the independence of expert panels.

Guideline 4-B: The QA & A agency has a training programme for experts as well as guidelines for the site-visits and the report-writing phase.

Guideline 4-C: The external panels will meet the various key groups in the institution, unaccompanied by agency representatives or national authority. The external panel

will meet students, academic and administrative staff members and external stakeholders, unaccompanied by representatives of the institutional leadership team.

Guideline 4-D: The report will reflect the view of all internal and external stakeholders whom the external panel met as well as the views of the whole expert panel..

Guideline 4-E: The report is made public after the institution has had the opportunity to correct factual errors. It will be written autonomously from the agency and the public authority and under the supervision of the chair of the expert panel (i.e., the report writer is an expert panel member rather than an agency or government representative).

STANDARD 5: QA & A procedures will follow guidelines that are transparent to the public and higher education institutions and will have specified and fair appeals procedures.

Procedure 5-1: The QA & A agency has developed and published a set of guidelines for all phases of the procedures which have been widely discussed.

Procedure 5-2: The QA & A agency has developed a set of procedures for appeals, especially in the case of negative accreditation decisions.

Guideline 5-A: The QA & A guidelines will be supported by the academic community as constituting fair and reasonable accountability procedures.

Guideline 5-B: The scope and limitations of QA & A procedures will be clear to the public and especially to students.

Guideline 5-C: Appeals board will include upstanding and independent members who have a demonstrated understanding of both higher education and evaluation. Board composition will be agreed upon in advance of any specific appeal procedure.

Guideline 5-D: Appeals board will hold hearings with the institution, the external panel and QA & A agency staff.

Guideline 5-E: Appeals board decisions will be reached independently of government, QA & A agency and higher education institutions and are binding.

STANDARD 6: QA & A agencies, where they exist, will have internal quality processes in place and be evaluated themselves, on a cyclical basis, in terms of the adequacy of their resources and their impact on institutions.

Procedure 6-1: The QA & A agency has clearly established lines of responsibilities.

Procedure 6-2: The QA & A agency has a training programme for its staff and a performance appraisal and staff development framework.

Procedure 6-3: The QA & A agency monitors the impact of its work on institutions in terms of efficiency (its financial burden as expressed in staff and direct costs to the institutions) and efficacy (whether quality enhancement does indeed result from the procedures).

Procedure 6-4: The QA & A agency is reviewed by a transnational expert panel that includes members of the higher education community and QA & A representatives, students and employers.

Guideline 6-A: There is documentation that QA & A agencies personnel policies have been openly discussed, published and implemented.

Guideline 6-B: The QA & A agency monitors its work by asking, within a year of an evaluation, that all institutions that it has evaluated provide the agency with an assessment of the procedure in terms of its outcome and cost.

Guideline 6-C: The transnational expert panel will be agreed with the national Rectors' Conference and the QA & A agency and will include one national member to assist in providing national understanding.

Guideline 6-D: The expert panel will interview a sample of all stakeholders to assess the fairness, independence and outcomes of the QA & A agency work.

Guideline 6-E: The expert panel will assess whether the QA & A agency has the appropriate financial and human resources and appropriate staff management policies to carry out its work professionally.

ESIB STATEMENT ON PEER REVIEW OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION AGENCIES (2004)

GENERAL FRAMEWORK FOR INTRODUCING A SYSTEM OF PEER REVIEW OF QA AND A AGENCIES

As part of the realisation of the European Higher Education Area the Ministers of Education held a Summit in Berlin in September 2003. In the resulting Communiqué the Ministers called ENQA in association with ESIB, EUA and EURASHE to fulfill certain mandates. One of the mandates called for the development of a general framework for introducing a system of peer review of QA and A agencies. The four organisations (ENQA, ESIB, EUA and EURASHE, hereafter called E4) have been meeting on a half-yearly basis for the past two years and this group was considered the best forum for realising the mandate from the Ministers. In order to facilitate this ESIB has produced a number of papers based on our previous policy papers and would like to elaborate more specifically on these in this statement.

Higher education is based upon the principle of maintaining and improving the quality of provision. This system is based upon each institution developing a quality culture and taking a proactive approach to quality assurance at the programme and institutional level. The reliability and scrutiny of these operations is dependent on an independent and transparent system of quality assurance which is usually fulfilled by national quality assurance agencies. When developing a European Higher Education Area it is essential to ensure that there is transparency and trust between national quality assurance systems. The Ministers in agreeing the Berlin Communiqué set out a framework to achieve this through a system based upon peer review.

At the European level, there already exists a network of qualification agencies, namely ENQA. This is useful since it already provides a framework in which peer review can operate and as such may form the basis of any future system of peer review. However it should be recognised that any peer review system requires wider involvement than just national quality assurance agencies. Such a system should ensure both ownership by all stakeholders and an external perception of independent scrutiny.

The aim of peer review is to ensure that all QA and A agencies carry out effective quality assurance at the national level that is trusted and as such the review of these QA and A agencies should ensure that they meet a set of criteria. When carrying out a review of a QA and A agency it is important that the review is seen as independent and is carried out by those best placed to assess the work of the agency.

ESIB believes that this peer review or "study visit" should consist of the main stakeholders in higher education, namely, representatives from higher education institutions, quality assurance agency representatives and students. Since this is being done on the European level, we would recommend that higher education representatives are nominated by either and/or EUA and EURASHE, quality assurance agency representatives nominated through ENQA and students nominated by ESIB. Experts from outside Europe may also be considered for the panel. To ensure effective and perceived independence, these representatives should not come from the same country as the agency being assessed, although due account must be taken of language issues to ensure effective translation and interpretation on documents and meetings to ensure the accuracy of the study visit.

When the report from the study visit is carried out it is important that it is dealt with in a way that is both fair and seen to be fair and so should report to a body made up equally of the representatives and stakeholders in higher education more widely, for the purposes of this paper we will call this body the "Board". This Board could possibly be within a wider framework that is made up primarily of HEI representatives, QA representatives and student representatives and could also include governmental representatives (e.g. a representative of the Bologna Follow-Up Group) and employers and employees organisations as observers

This Board should assess the study visit report and monitor the implementation of the recommendations, decide on the need for follow-up visits and in most extreme cases decide on the ongoing membership of the organisation. The agency assessed will of course be able to see and comment on the report before it is presented to the Board. In addition to this a representative of the

national agency should be invited to the Board to allow an opportunity for comments and questions. Once the report has been approved by the Board it will be made public and whilst there may be some initial fears about this publication it will help engender a spirit of trust and transparency both within the higher education community and in the wider public where issues such as accountability of public funding and trust of quality in education are key issues. It will also be a useful tool for those agencies that have not yet been assessed to outline both what is expected and as a way of sharing best practice. These reports have the primary role of ensuring high quality education across Europe and so should look at ways of supporting the member to continually improve, and developing partnerships to support this work. The removal of membership of the European level organisation should only be used as the very final stage in the process once all other methods for improvement have been exhausted.

The reports should be based on evaluating whether the QA and/or A agency meeting the membership criteria for European level organisation which should be strengthened to ensure that all members are seen as legitimate bodies to carry out their function.

IN PRACTICE HOW PEER REVIEW COULD BE CARRIED OUT:

A national quality assurance agency from Europe has applied to the Board to be recognised as a quality assurance agency at the European level and receive the so-called “European Label for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agencies” to operate within the European Higher Education Area. The agency has submitted its statutes in both the native language and in English as well as a letter outlining why they would like to be recognised. The Board having decided that they broadly meet the criteria, agree to investigate their application at the next stage of the application process and set up a study visit of that agency.

The study visit is made up of a representative from ENQA (nominated by their steering group and taking into account gender representativity), a representative from ESIB (nominated by their Executive Committee), a representative from EUA (nominated by their Board), a representative from EURASHE (nominated by their Board) and also a quality assurance expert from outside Europe chosen by the Board.

This five person study visit, not including anyone from the applicant country, but assisted by a translator as necessary, would then meet amongst themselves to discuss the papers presented by the agency and decide on their plan of work. They would then visit the country for probably a three-day period and have several meetings with the agency and also other stakeholders including the national students union, rectors conference, Ministry and other bodies to ensure that the criteria are met.

When they are sure that they have enough information the study visit will meet again to create their report based on their findings and also their recommendation as to whether they should accept the agency or not. This report is then sent to the agency for discussion and any proposed amendments are discussed with the study visit team. When the study visit team is happy that the report is a true representation of the situation they will submit the report to the Board where they will make a presentation of the recommendations. A representative from the agency will also be invited to answer questions from the Board. After a period of discussion, part of which can be held in closed session from the applicant, they will make their decision. The decision and also the recommendations of the report from the study visit will then be made public to interested parties including the press.

This process could also be used to decide membership of the European level QA&A grouping. The review process of agencies must be a cyclical process, held approximately every five years

Any National agency unsatisfied with the result of the decision of the Board would then be able to lodge an appeal with the organisation or group with responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the Bologna Objectives or through a system determined by that group. This recognises the fact that the legitimacy of the nature and instruments of the European Higher Education Area stems from the Conference of Ministers and the Follow-Up Group. +A successful appeal would result in the decision being referred back the Board of ENQA for re-consideration.

CRITERIA ON WHICH THE AGENCY IS ASSESSED:

- An agency must have a clear legal basis, its own budget and professional staff with resources proportional to assigned tasks
- The agency must be active in, at least, one of the countries within the Bologna Process
- Review results must in all cases reflect the findings of the reviews and not be subject to any pressure from other sources
- Terms of procedures (inc the terms of references and identification of experts) of evaluations must be defined by evaluation professionals of quality assurance agencies, in consultation with representatives of students and HEIs not by other bodies
- The section on internal quality assurance mechanisms of the agencies must also include an indication of no conflict-of-interest mechanisms in the selection of external experts
- Reports by the national agency must be made public.
- The process of review undertaken by the national agency should be cyclical.

Also the agency must have:

- Internal feedback mechanisms that includes procedures for reflections and subsequently revisions on processes and methods
- Mechanisms that provide feedback from external expert panels
- Mechanisms that ensure dialogue and feedback from stakeholders. The latter may be institutions or programmes that have been evaluated, stakeholders in general such as higher education institutions and should be students and student organisations, while bearing in mind representativity.
- Present on the agency website a public (i.e. non confidential) quality policy, including agency goals, processes and methods and a description of their decision making processes and governance structures to enable transparency and accountability.

This statement was adopted at the 46th Board Meeting in Banja Luka, Bosnia-Herzegovina, April 2004

ESIB Statement

GENERAL PAPER ON AGREED SET OF STANDARDS, PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES AT EUROPEAN LEVEL (2004)

This will be the last of four papers that ESIB will produce for the E4 (ESIB, EUA, ENQA, EURASHE) meetings in order to ensure the effective input of ESIB's view relating to the mandate given to the four organisations at the Berlin Ministerial Summit in September 2003 relating to quality assurance and accreditation. The second paper gave a general overview to the mandate on standards, procedures and guidelines, in this paper we have added a more description of ESIBs opinion on it.

MANDATE FROM MINISTERS IN BERLIN:

"At the European level, Ministers call upon ENQA through its members, in cooperation with the EUA, EURASHE and ESIB, to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance..."

STANDARDS

Quality Assurance is an ongoing process that ensures the delivery of agreed standards. These agreed standards should make sure every educational institution, of which the quality is assured, has the potential ability to achieve a high quality.

Standards refer to minimum level and degree requirements in the form of learning outcomes Beside this, they should also serve the purpose of quality enhancement and improvement.

The first and most important issue when tackling this question within the context of the Bologna Process is defining what the mandate given in the Berlin Communiqué actually refers to: European standards or European reference points for these standards that are still outlined at the national and institutional level. If it is the former then it is probably too large a mandate to fulfill within the 15 month period leading towards the Bergen Ministerial Summit. It could also be argued whether this was what the Ministers meant by their Communiqué and the full implications of this have been adequately considered and could be something discussed further in Bergen and fulfilled leading towards the following Summit. In the meantime an achievable goal can be a common set of reference points at the European level by which the national standards, guidelines and procedures can be measured.

ESIB's quality assurance policy paper would support this desire for reference points rather than a European set of standards: "For quality assurance the goal of the European dimension should be to achieve transparency, comparability and compatibility of quality assurance systems, not to replace them, recognising that there is a variation in the background of the higher education systems in Europe and on the national perspective on quality assurance and accreditation.

Therefore cooperation should be established, where compatible procedures and common standards and guidelines for quality assurance can be agreed on. The cooperation should aim at recognition of quality assurance systems using the agreed standards, procedures and guidelines.

Two sorts of standards with a different way of development, both as important for enhancement of good quality education.

Generic standards: general competences students should gain for a specific level and profile of qualifications. (e.g. general standards of a 1st or 2nd cycle degree). Development of these standards should be done in line with the development of Qualification Frameworks and be descriptive rather than prescriptive.

Specific standards: these standards are linked to the specific content of education programmes. Standards in this field should be seen as reference points. These reference points should not be

developed in a top-down way by a quality assurance or accreditation agency that also develops the generic standards since this would make the workload for the agency unnecessarily bureaucratic and the standards static and inflexible. The specific content related standards should preferably be developed by experts from the scientific field for related programmes of different (national and international) HEIs.

PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES

Common procedures and guidelines deal with the way in which quality assurance agencies function and the methodology they use. Hereafter the principles will be explained which in ESIBs point of view should become the common shared procedures and guidelines for quality assurance within the European Higher Education Area.

The goal of quality assurance is to improve education. It should therefore take place on all levels of education (course, programme, institutional and all its sub-divisions) and be a continuous process.

THE PROCESS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

The process of quality assurance should consist of three different steps.

Step one is to develop criteria or standards of quality, which will be used in the further process of quality assurance. In this step the criteria should be based on the views of the external expert team and the academic community (including students).

Step two is the internal accreditation or self-evaluation of the individual program. This results in a self-evaluation report. In this step the entire view of the higher education community (students, teaching staff, researchers and support staff) must have a direct influence.

Step three is the external accreditation by an accreditation body. The accreditation body should be publicly accountable and operationally independent from the ministries of education and the higher education institution concerned. The full and active involvement of students in this step is essential.

The result of the third step is an external accreditation report. In this step it is also possible to get feedback and recommendations about individual programs. The result of the entire process is an accreditation report accessible by all stakeholders. If accreditation is to be accepted by all parties concerned the process must be completely transparent.

THE LEVELS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

Quality assurance at the programme level is essential because even within institutions standards and procedures may vary and students should be able to base their programme choice on reliable and accurate information.

A national agency should regard as its primary function the assurance of quality at a programme level. This may involve implementation of a regular and planned schedule of audit procedures over a period of years by the agency. This information should be published and available to students and all the other stakeholders in education. Such a system of audit should look at all aspects of the academic provision at that level and should be used by the institution to maintain and improve the quality of all programmes. Also aspects of other levels within the institution that have a vital impact on the quality of programmes have to be taken into account in the audit.

All external audit processes of this type should fully engage with the institutional management, academic and support staff as well as students and their representatives. The external audit should be undertaken by external panels, whose members should be as independent as possible and include students as full members. Nevertheless, the process should be based on peer review. The reports of the external audit processes have to be made public in a format accessible to students and in a way that would not give rise to ranking.

An external expert team mainly checks if the intentions of programmes as defined by the institution/programme and explained in self-study reports are estimated in line with minimal standards (especially for the intended profile/level).

INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

Because the programme quality assurance is of the greatest importance for students this cannot be substituted by a purely institutional level approach to quality assurance. Nevertheless, ESIB also sees a great subsidiary value in quality assurance on the institutional level. The ultimate goal of institutional quality assurance is to develop an internal quality culture, which ensures that quality is a focus of the institution at all levels and is incorporated in the everyday work of the whole institutional community.

Institutional quality assurance and evaluation is primarily a responsibility of the higher education institutions. The first step of the process is defining the goals and missions by the decision making bodies at institutional and faculty level. The learning environment for the student should be at the core of these goals and missions.

The internal quality assurance work should be carried out by internal bodies consisting of professors, teachers, staff and students that have to be set up at all levels within the institution. A coordinating body should be set up at the institutional level to monitor the quality assurance processes and comprise the missions and goals into a cohesive institutional strategy. This body should be accountable to the decision making bodies and the HEI governing bodies to ensure that necessary steps are taken and the process is carried out in a continuous manner to reach the goals of the institution. All results and outcomes of the quality assurance process must be made public.

Also on the institutional level audits by an external body, which could be the national quality assurance agency, have to be undertaken. This audit would review the HEI governing bodies and management, internal quality mechanisms as well as student support structures within the institution that cover more than one programme and the overall quality of student life and student activity at the institution.

On a European level it's not possible nor desirable to formulate an extensive list of aspects of higher education programmes and institutes that have influence on it's quality and thus should be included in the process of QA. Nevertheless, a limited number of aspects that are of universal importance for good quality education can be defined as guidelines for quality assurance:

- Mission and goals of programmes and institutions
- Quality of content of education
- Quality of the education process
- Relation between education and research
- Results for graduates (satisfaction, employability)
- Quality of the learning process (achievability)
- Internal QA process of education
- Internal QA procedures of teaching personal
- Governance/leadership
- Participation of students in all decision making bodies (on all levels)
- Internationalisation
- Educational facilities
- Equality
- Access provision
- Use of funds

This statement was adopted at the 46th Board Meeting in Banja Luka, Bosnia-Herzegovina, April 2004

ESIB Policy Paper

QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION – IMPROVING QUALITY AND PROMOTING MOBILITY

*Adopted at the 45th Board Meeting
Porto Santo, Portugal, November 2003*

PREAMBLE

ESIB – The National Unions of Students in Europe was founded in 1982 to promote the educational, economic, cultural, social and political interests of students in Europe. ESIB, through its 48 members from 36 countries, currently represents more than 10 million students in Europe.

INTRODUCTION

Quality is a distinguishing characteristic that provides a guide for students and higher education institutions. ESIB believes that quality of the higher education is one of the highest priorities in the debates within the European higher education society. The Bologna Process is one important driver for this debate. ESIB warmly welcomes this, because a debate on the quality of Higher Education within Europe concerns the heart of our work: highly qualified and accessible higher education. High quality and accessibility should be two sides of one coin. Accessible higher education that is not of high quality is worthless and high quality education that is not widely accessible is meaningless. ESIB welcomes the further development of international co-operation to improve the quality, transparency, comparability and compatibility of degrees and studies. There are many different types of quality assurance and accreditation agencies across Europe. There are agencies claiming to do quality assurance, actually doing accreditation and the other way around. Furthermore the aims and methods of quality assurance and accreditation differ from country to country and there are obscurities in the terms being used. To make the situation more confusing, institutions are at the moment inviting accreditation agencies from outside Europe to accredit their programmes. The situation of accreditation is chaotic and uncontrolled which does not enhance the mutual trust between higher education institutions or benefit higher education in Europe and as such threatens mobility. There is variation in the background of the higher education systems in Europe. This means that requirements for quality assurance and accreditation also vary. Every country within the Bologna process has committed itself to creating a system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures. Implementation of such subsystems may vary depending on the national context, but ESIB does see some general principles. In this document ESIB gives a definition of quality assurance and accreditation and discusses ESIB's point of view on these. A clear definition of quality assurance and accreditation helps to assess the work different quality assurance and accreditation agencies undertake and whether this should actually be regarded or rather as accreditation. Then we give our point of view on the different levels in and the different aspects of quality assurance.

DEFINITIONS

Quality assurance

Quality Assurance is an ongoing process that ensures the delivery of agreed standards. These agreed standards should make sure every educational institution, of which the quality is assured, has the potential ability to achieve a high quality of content. Quality Assurance must not to be confused with accreditation. The goal of Quality Assurance is to improve education and therefore it should take place on all levels (course, programme, and institution and its sub-divisions) and be a continuous process.

Accreditation

Accreditation is both a status and a process. It should provide a public certification of acceptable minimum quality as well as the opportunity and incentive for self-improvement in the programs accredited. The process of accreditation should provide higher education with an opportunity for critical self-analysis leading to improvement of quality; for consultation and advice from persons coming from other higher education institutions. Accreditation reflects the fact that in achieving recognition, the individual program is committed to self-study and external review. Not only to meet certain minimum standards but also to continuously seek ways in which to enhance the quality of education. Therefore accreditation must be a process in different steps: the three stepping-stones of accreditation. Step one is to develop criteria or standards, which will be used in the accreditation process. In this step the criteria should be based on the views of external experts, the academic community (incl. the students). Step two is the internal accreditation or the self-evaluation of the individual program. The result of this step is a self-evaluation report. In this step the entire view of the higher education community (students, teaching staff, researchers and support staff) must have a direct influence. Step three is the external accreditation by an accreditation body. This accreditation body should be publicly accountable and operationally independent from the ministries of education and the higher education institution concerned. The full and active involvement of students in this step is essential. The result of this step is an external accreditation report. Also included in this step is of course the possibility for the individual program to get feedback and recommendations. The result of the whole accreditation process is an accreditation report accessible by all stakeholders. If accreditation is to be accepted by all parties concerned the process must be completely transparent.

THE NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Programme level

Recognising that there will be extended periods between external audit processes, all institutions should also develop internal quality assurance processes at the programme level. Institutions should develop effective follow-up procedures after external programme audit. Institutional management and governing bodies, academic and support staff as well as students and their representatives should be fully involved in the process of programme quality assurance, including planning, implementation and review. The external review panel should assess the efficacy of the internal quality assurance processes at the programme level. Quality assurance at the programme level is essential because even within institutions standards and procedures may vary and students should be able to base their programme choices on reliable and accurate information. A national agency, that is publicly accountable and operationally independent from the ministry and the higher education institutions, should regard as its primary function the assurance of quality at a programme level. This may involve implementation of a regular and planned schedule of audit procedures over a period of years by the agency. This information should be published and available to students and all the other stakeholders in education. The external auditing at the programme level must not judge the issues related to the freedom of teaching and research. Such a system of audit should look at all aspects of the academic provision at that level (e.g. library and IT resources, tutor support, student participation etc.) and should be used by the institution to maintain and improve the quality of all programmes. All external audit processes of this type should fully engage with the institutional management, academic and support staff as well as students and their representatives. This engagement should include the representation of students as full members of the external review panels. All members of these panels should be as independent as possible, but this process should be based on peer review. The reports of the external audit processes have to be made public in a format accessible to students and in a way that would not give rise to ranking.

Institutional level

Subsidiary in this approach there is a need to develop institutional and internal quality assurance mechanisms in the framework of a "fitness for purpose" approach to measure and assess whether the institutions are fulfilling the missions they have defined for themselves. The development of sound internal and institutional quality assurance mechanisms plays a key role in that assessment. With a framework for institutional quality assurance in place, higher education institutions will also be better empowered to meet the challenges posed by societal change and the development of knowledge based economy and society. The learning environment for the students should be at the core of these goals and missions. The students are a heterogeneous group (there is for instance diversity within the

group when it comes to gender, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, social background or situational defined disabilities). All defined goals and missions should take this heterogeneity into account to create higher education institutions that are both universally accessible to all, and sound learning environments for all students. The ultimate goal of institutional quality assurance is to develop an internal quality culture, which ensures that quality is a focus of the institution at all levels and is incorporated in the everyday work of the institutional management, academic and support staff as well as students and their representatives. Institutional quality assurance and evaluation is primarily a responsibility of the higher education institutions. The first step of the process is defining the goals and missions by the decision making bodies at institutional and faculty level. The learning environment for the student should be at the core of these goals and missions. The students are a heterogeneous group (there is for instance diversity within the group when it comes to gender, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, social background or situational defined disabilities). All defined goals and missions should take this heterogeneity into account to create higher education institutions that are both universally accessible to all, and sound learning environment for all students. Internal quality assurance bodies consisting of professors, teachers, staff and students need to be set up at all levels afterwards to carry out the internal quality assurance work. A coordinating body, comprising the university management and governing bodies, students and academic and support staff should be set up at the institutional level to monitor these processes and comprise the missions and goals into a cohesive institutional strategy. This body should be accountable to the decision-making bodies and the university governing bodies to ensure that necessary steps are taken and the process is carried out in a continuous manner to reach the goals of the institution. All results and outcomes of the quality assurance process must be made public and especially accessible to students and in a way that would not give rise to ranking. There must be an institutional audit by an external body, which could be the national quality assurance agency. This audit would review the HEI governing bodies and management, internal quality mechanisms as well as support structures within the institution that cover more than one programme (e.g. library and IT resources, tutor support and student participation) and the overall quality of student life and student activity at the institution.

Quality assurance and accreditation

The development of quality assurance and evaluation at an institutional level and quality assurance and accreditation on programme level is of key importance for maintaining and enhancing quality. For the protection and guidance of students, quality assurance and accreditation at the programme level must be of prime importance. Individual students are most directly affected by the quality of their own programme of study and therefore programme level reports will be the best guide of quality for those students. Institutional quality assurance is also of great relevance as it helps the institutions to develop a higher level of quality to the benefit of all actors in the higher education sector and therefore, this institutional evaluation should address more than just the content of academic provision and cover support facilities such as library and IT resources, tutor support and student participation. These two processes should be seen as complementary and both methods of quality assurance are essential for the development of higher education. Because programme quality assurance is of the greatest importance for students this cannot be substituted by a purely institution level approach to quality assurance.

The European dimension

For quality assurance the goal of the European dimension should be to achieve transparency, comparability and compatibility of quality assurance systems, not to replace them, recognising that there is a variation in the background of the higher education systems in Europe and on the national perspective on quality assurance and accreditation. Therefore cooperation should be established, where compatible procedures and common standards and guidelines for quality assurance can be agreed on. These should be developed to encompass a wide range of quality assurance systems, as long as these secure a minimum level assurance of the quality of higher education. This cooperation is also needed for exchange of best practice in the systems of programme and institutional quality assurance. The cooperation should aim at recognition of quality assurance systems using the agreed standards, procedures and guidelines. Common procedures and guidelines deal with the way in which quality assurance agencies function and the methodology they use. Common standards are defined as minimum level and degree requirements in the form of learning outcomes. At the European level there should be an organised network of national quality assurance and accreditation agencies to facilitate this sharing of best practice and cooperation and the establishment of common standards, procedures and guidelines, leading to mutual recognition. This network subjects its members to peer review to give suggestions on their development and to assure recognition outside of the national

context. This peer review should be conducted by a group comprising of other quality assurance agencies, HEI associations and ESIB. Additionally there are and there will be regional and thematic accreditors. To enhance the quality of education and the mobility of students and graduates in Europe their work has to be linked to the national quality assurance systems in Europe. Via the aforementioned network a European system of meta-accreditation of these accreditors has to be created. This meta-accreditation system should ensure basic principles and it should assess accreditors according to a set of procedural criteria and standards.

The global level

There is currently a great emphasis placed on co-operation between quality assurance agencies and structures in a European context as a result of a number of initiatives including regional networks and the Bologna Process. However as mobility on a global level continues to develop and expand there will be an increasing need for greater co-operation, communication and mutual recognition at this wider level. ESIB believes that this co-operation needs to be expanded and strengthened as soon as possible and as at the European level should be based on the recognition of the wide range of quality assurance systems, by seeking transparency and comparability rather than uniformity. Any such co-operation should include all actors in the field of quality assurance and accreditation. To achieve this, UNESCO should develop as soon as possible, a review process of quality assurance agencies and accreditors which are active at the global level. The review process should function on the basis of peer review. To prepare for this review process and code of good practice for global quality assurance agencies and accreditors should be developed. In this manner transparency could be brought to a global level.

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FOLLOW- UP ON THE BOLOGNA DECLARATION: A EUROPEAN QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) was formally established in 1999 on the basis of the recommendation on Quality in Higher Education adopted by the Council of Ministers on 24 September 1998. This recommendation encourages the further introduction of quality assurance methods in higher education and the promotion of European cooperation in this field. It recommends to the Member States that they establish transparent quality assessment and quality assurance systems, which should be based on a number of common principles. These principles were established in the earlier European pilot projects 1994-95.

The membership of ENQA is open to quality assurance agencies of the European Union, public authorities responsible for higher education and European associations of higher education institutions. ENQA also includes representation from the CEE countries.

The steering group of ENQA has been following closely the European debate following upon the Bologna Declaration of June 1999. The Declaration calls, amongst other things, for the promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies.

On this point the Declaration accordingly parallels closely the Council Recommendation of November 1998. The recommendation focuses exactly on the need for member states to face the task of organising their higher education systems in ways that respect existing academic standards, training objectives, and quality standards. Further, the recommendation stresses that transparent educational systems are required for transnational mobility.

This mandate has been closely followed by ENQA, building on the fact that the basis for the work of the network is the already existing level of cooperation and harmonization of practices among the existing agencies for quality assurance. The broad objectives of the network are accordingly being implemented through initiatives such as the following:

- The support, development and improvement of the work of the agencies in charge of external quality assessment by exchanges of experience between the quality assurance agencies and the discussion of practical questions
- The promotion of co-operation in shaping a trans-national, European dimension to quality assurance, i.e. by introducing a European perspective in the staff development of QA-agencies.
 - The promotion of contacts and dissemination of experience with other actors such as public authorities, higher education institutions, and students
 - The promotion of discussion on follow-up procedures to quality evaluations.
 - The provision of assistance to authorities and institutions wishing to introduce quality assurance by providing expertise and advice on how to introduce quality assurance mechanisms and how to set up a quality assurance system.
 - The focus on the relations between quality assurance and other issues of higher education policy mentioned in the Recommendation, such as academic and professional recognition and accreditation.
 - The development of quality assurance instruments for new modes of delivery such as open and distance learning.

It follows that ENQA is well into the process of making the network a viable framework for providing answers and solutions to issues such as those raised by the Bologna Declaration.

ENQA's steering group is convinced that the basic premise for a European quality assurance dimension is the existence of well-established and effective national systems of quality assurance – so long as higher education is primarily funded and legally regulated on a national basis. However, the steering group also recognises that the national systems have, as a general rule, developed their procedures and methodologies with a focus on their own national educational arrangements. The

steering group is fully aware that new developments challenge the purely national context for quality assurance.

The need for change is to a large extent related to internationalisation. Among the international changes affecting higher education are a growing international market for higher education, transnational education and a need for recognition of degrees due to graduate mobility. The Bologna Declaration can be viewed as a European response to these developments.

The exact extent to which these new developments are already present at a substantial level is, in the opinion of the steering group, a subject for discussion. However, there is no doubt that European higher education institutions do perceive themselves as confronted by new challenges that demand new solutions, preferably at a European level. One prominent example of this development is the project launched in 2000 by The Association of European Universities (CRE), with the aim of exploring the context and the feasibility of accreditation as a European solution to the challenges of internationalisation generally and the framework of the Bologna Declaration specifically.*

In accordance with the aims of the CRE project, the preparations for and discussions at the closing Lisbon seminar focused primarily on using the concept of accreditation as the building stone for various particular proposals. However, the seminar also concluded that accreditation should not be viewed as an end itself but rather as one of a number of possible components in a European approach to quality assurance. The steering group of ENQA agrees that accreditation raises more questions in a European context than it answers, while nonetheless recognising its use as a possible element in a general quality assurance system. The defining characteristic of accreditation is that the process is based on established standards/criteria and that the result of the process is a decision - 'yes' or 'no' - as to whether these standards have in fact been met by the institution or programme under accreditation. Whether labeled accreditation or something different, the important thing is that the method used is based on agreed and published standards and makes a formal codified statement about whether or not the evaluated object meets these standards.

But however defined, in a European context an accreditation process should not differ in methodological principle from the evaluation procedures generally applied already by the European agencies. In terms of basic methodology the European platform already exists as a consequence of ever-closer cooperation during the last decade among European agencies and governments.

One major result of the European Pilot Projects was precisely the identification of features common to the existing European quality assurance systems. The Council Recommendation of September 1998 lists in an annex these indicative features of quality assurance in the following way:

- The features referred to below are common to existing European quality assurance systems. The European pilot projects assessing the quality of higher education have demonstrated that all parties involved in this area can benefit from observing these features.
- The autonomy and/or independence, in terms of the relevant structures in each Member State, of the body responsible for quality assurance (as regards procedures and methods) is likely to contribute to the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures and the acceptance of their results.
- Quality assurance criteria are closely linked to the aims assigned to each institution in relation to the needs of society and of the labour market; the different quality assurance procedures must therefore include allowance for the specific nature of the institution. Knowledge of the institution's objectives be it at the level of the whole institution, at the level of a department or at the level of a single unit, is essential in this respect.
- Quality assurance procedures should generally consist of an internal, self-examination component and an external component based on appraisal by external experts. The internal element of self-examination should aim to involve all the relevant players, especially teaching staff and, where appropriate, administrators in charge of academic and professional guidance, as well as students. The external element should be a process of cooperation, consultation and advice between independent experts from outside and players from within the institution.
- In the light of the objectives and criteria used in the quality assurance procedure and with reference to the structures of higher education in the Member States, professional associations, social partners and alumni could be included in the expert groups. The participation of foreign experts in the procedures would be desirable in order to encourage exchange of experience acquired in other countries.

- Reports on quality assurance procedures and their outcome should be published in a form appropriate to each Member State and should provide a source of good reference material for partners and for the general public.

ISSUES AND PROBLEMS OF A EUROPEAN QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

The steering group of ENQA agrees that it is now the relevant time to look more closely at why and how an accreditation perspective might usefully be applied to the existing framework for evaluation and quality assurance.

One overriding issue is that of securing a European dimension in the future process. During recent months there has been substantial focus on the need for some kind of European organisation to provide a framework for the coming discussions and decisions.

ENQA itself constitutes a framework, established by the European Commission and based on a recommendation by the Council of Ministers. This framework for quality assurance in European higher education is already in place and working. The CRE project concludes with a recommendation to set up a "European Platform" of the higher education institutions, involving also students, quality assurance and accreditation agencies and networks, professional organisations, recognition centres as well as national and regional higher education authorities.

The steering group agrees that further analysis is necessary and that pilot projects may be useful tools, as they have been before in this context. The steering group has a positive attitude towards sharing a platform with higher education institutions, student organisations and other stakeholders, if the purpose of this platform is to investigate the possibilities of identifying common goals, procedures and methodologies.

However, the steering group recommends that great care be taken in the composition of such a platform. On the one hand, it is doubtful whether a very diversified platform composed of members with divergent basic interests could realistically be expected to proceed towards more operational solutions, including pilot projects. On the other hand, the steering group does not believe that a platform should be the responsibility of only one of the participants, so that there can be no reason to distrust the credibility of the outcome from the start.

At the same time the steering group wishes to point out that a pan-European solution may not be the only or most effective answer. In some cases a more limited, possibly regional, organisation could be at least as relevant. The Nordic quality assurance agencies have joined together in a mutual project on the relevance of accreditation in the context of their higher education culture. The Dutch and Flemish ministers of education have taken a similar, but more ambitious initiative. Other countries may be planning to organise themselves in smaller groups for further analysis and recognition of problems connected with the accreditation issue.

The steering group recognizes several important factors and problem areas in terms of identifying what directions a European quality assurance approach could take. The overall issue is, of course, which quality assurance problems could be solved by such an approach and at what costs, and what problems would not be solved.

For the coming discussions the steering group recommends the following aspects as deserving special notice:

1. The relevance of establishing a European context for the mutual recognition of quality assurance systems.
2. The need of governments for credible quality assurance of higher education.
3. The relationship and priority between accreditation of institutions and of programmes
4. The relevance of a comprehensive system for the university as well as the nonuniversity sector
5. The responsibility for establishing criteria, standards and benchmarks with a European dimension.
6. The international dimension of national quality systems

7. How to validate evaluation/accreditation procedures (meta-accreditation)
8. The risk of new bureaucratic and costly constructions with too little value added
9. The problem of making a European quality assurance dimension sufficiently comprehensive so that it provides real consumer protection for students and employers.

Other problems could be listed. There seems to be among some European higher education institutions uncertainty as to whether accreditation should first and foremost work as a promotional instrument towards establishing institutional merits with a view towards the international higher education market. However, an accreditation system with the purpose of promoting European higher education is not necessarily compatible with a system that has the intention of providing transparency and consumer protection.

Any discussion of these matters must take into consideration the fact that some actors are already very active in the field of accreditation. Both US-based accrediting organisations and European associations are increasingly positioning themselves in a growing European market for accreditation. To ignore this and do nothing might be the same thing as encouraging an uncoordinated and confusing proliferation of agencies.

The steering group strongly supports the point that it must be a common European task to identify the less credible accreditation agencies being established. It would be a natural task for ENQA, which has already set up criteria for agencies that apply for membership of the network. But the steering group recognizes at the same time the need to share such an effort with other stakeholders. Mutual recognition of quality assurance systems could be a sufficient or at least important step. Accordingly one of the important issues for future discussion should be the extent to which a European platform could function as a meta-accreditation agency in the same manner as the US Council for Higher Education Accreditation functions as an accreditor of US agencies. The problem in this context is the potential conflict between national legislation and meta-accreditation judgements. However, it should be a minimum requirement that foreign providers of accreditation accept the national rules.

The steering group is convinced that an eventual new European platform or accreditation organisation should not for the time being have ambitions above those of a meta-accrediting agency. Any mandate for direct accreditation would be highly problematic in terms of existing national priorities and procedures.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The steering group recognizes that the accreditation issue is now part of the European quality assurance agenda. Even if the European governments and quality assurance agencies do not establish systems of accreditation it is nevertheless very likely that accreditation will have some future role to play as a part of the European quality assurance scene. Nongovernmental accreditation programs have already been established in Europe and accreditation agencies based in the United States are also active here. But the steering group wishes to emphasise that any more general approach towards accreditation in Europe should be an integrated development from existing quality assurance structures and should not be an additional obligation for institutions of higher education. It is on this basis that the steering group supports the initialisation of a common European framework for quality assurance to look into the possibilities for accreditation.

Whatever the importance of internationalisation it is not possible to create a European accreditation framework overnight. The number of issues raised above clearly illustrates that. There are many problems to solve before such a system could come into operation. Nor is it possible to consider a European accreditation framework without taking into account the national dimension of higher education. National governments are still dominant in terms of regulation and finance and they are unlikely to give away their competence in relation to quality assurance in the foreseeable future.

From the perspective of the steering group, the relevance of close cooperation between national agencies and governments, in strengthening already existing sharing of best practices and building up of joint methodologies, must not be underestimated.

However, it will be the recommendation of the steering group to the General Assembly of ENQA that the Network moves forward in cooperation with higher education institutions, students and other stakeholders in order to secure best practices and relevant organizational forms for the follow up to the Bologna Declaration.

* This memo on a European quality assurance system as part of the Bologna follow up process is the responsibility of the steering group of ENQA. The memo will be presented to the general assembly of ENQA at its meeting in 22-23 May 2001.

* The steering group of ENQA has been associated with this project in its later stages and was represented at the final workshop in Brussels and at the closing conference in Lisbon.

INQAAHE POLICY STATEMENT

(International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education)

Although the policy statement has been agreed by the INQAAHE board, it continues to be “work in progress”.

OBJECTIVES OF EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE (EQA)

The main objective of External Quality Assurance (EQA) is to help promote the enhancement of quality of higher education. EQA also plays an important part in ensuring that higher education is accountable to its various stakeholders and in the protection of their interests. The stakeholders include:

- Students and potential students
- Their families and other individuals who provide them with financial and other support
- Employers
- Governments
- Foundations and other agencies that support the work of higher education
- The wider community, including the international and regional community.

While Quality Enhancement should always be regarded as an essential part of external quality assurance processes the aim should be that the quality enhancement grows in importance, relative to quality assurance and accreditation, as new institutions and systems become more firmly established.

PRIMACY OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND INTEGRITY

While higher education comes in many forms, the Network holds that the defining characteristics of higher education include clear policy and procedural commitments to academic integrity and academic freedom, which is the recognition that academic endeavours should be wholly conducted in a spirit of honesty and openness. External quality assurance should be conducted in such a way as to promote academic freedom and intellectual and institutional integrity.

HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (HEIs) HAVE PRIME RESPONSIBILITY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

EQA activities should be based on the premise that Quality and Quality Assurance are primarily the responsibilities of HEIs themselves and should respect institutional integrity.

INDEPENDENCE OF EVALUATION

Every effort should be made to ensure the independence of the individual evaluators, including the adoption of a clear policy on real or potential conflicts of interest.

EQA should be carried out in the context of criteria and procedures that are published in advance of any review. The formulation of such criteria and procedures should include consultation with major stakeholders. The EQA process itself should be carried out in a spirit of independence, and judgements made as part of the review should not be subject to external influences whether from governments, institutions or elsewhere.

It is accepted that in some circumstances an EQA agency does not itself have decision-making powers but makes recommendations to others. In such cases it is important to ensure that the

agency is in a position to make an independent recommendation which, save in exceptional circumstances, is made public.

ACCOUNTABILITY OF EQAs

Decisions made by EQAs should be based on clear and published criteria and should be reached after the application of transparent processes and procedures.

EQA agencies should be publicly accountable.

EQA agencies should themselves be subject to regular quality review that contains a significant external element.

MEMBERSHIP CRITERIA

At present INQAAHE maintains a policy whereby all agencies, including those who have been established but which have not yet commenced operations, can become full members so long as they meet the qualifying criteria as set out in the constitution, that is that they are organisations responsible for assuring the academic quality of post-secondary institutions or education programmes other than their own.

INQAAHE is keeping this policy under review in that it recognises that at some point it may be appropriate to distinguish between those agencies that can demonstrate their competence and those that have not yet reached that stage.

GUIDELINES OF GOOD PRACTICE

INQAAHE does not believe that there is one model of quality assurance that should be used in all circumstances. Nonetheless it believes that it is possible to identify a set of core guidelines that should underpin EQA activities. Accordingly it has published such a statement. While further work is being undertaken on the statement the Network believes that it had reached the stage where it can be commended to members. It has therefore been distributed to members in the hope that members will seek to act in accordance with the guidelines set out in the paper.

INQAAHE AND REGIONAL GROUPING

INQAAHE recognises that a great deal of co-operative work between EQA agencies is conducted at the regional level. It is therefore committed to work with regional organisations whether they be sub-regions of the Network or entirely independent of it.

CROSS-BORDER HIGHER EDUCATION

INQAAHE believes that the EQA of cross-border higher education is most effectively carried out when done in partnership between the EQA agencies of the exporting and importing countries.

Study Excerpts

*** Please note that the footnote numbers may not correspond with the footnote numbers in the original document as these excerpts have been reformatted ***

Chapter: **Quality Enhancement and Quality Assurance**

In: EUA publication *Trends IV: European Universities Implementing Bologna (2005)*

Chapter: **Quality assurance – qualitative diversity?**

In: ESIB publication *Bologna with Student Eyes (2005)*

Chapter: **Quality Enhancement at Programme Level: the Tuning Approach**

In: Tuning Report *Tuning Educational Structures II (2005)*

Executive Summary & Chapter: **Types of Evaluation in European QA**

In: ENQA publication *Quality Procedures in European HE (2003)*

QUALITY ENHANCEMENT AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYBILLE REICHERT

Chapter 4 excerpt from EUA publication:

TRENDS IV: EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES IMPLEMENTING BOLOGNA (2005)

In the Berlin Communiqué, the European Ministers of Education clearly expressed their belief that “*the quality of higher education has proven to be at the heart of the setting up of a European Higher Education Area.*” They also stressed that “*the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself and this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework.*” A European Higher Education Area in which students and professors move around freely presupposes a basis of knowledge and trust concerning the different environments of learning, teaching or research. In this study, we therefore focus on the efforts of higher education institutions to assure and enhance quality within the institution.

1. QUALITY AND THE BOLOGNA REFORMS

The *Trends IV* site visits show very clearly that institutional efforts to develop the quality of education, research and services go far beyond actual internal quality processes and procedures. Many other institutional processes, such as staff and student recruitment, staff development, resource allocation and infrastructure management have a major impact on the quality of core institutional functions, and when combined effectively constitute the quality culture of an institution.

Indeed, the Bologna reforms themselves are a good case in point: **the process of addressing major structural and curriculum reform issues has brought added value to institutions in a variety of ways, in particular enhancing the quality of teaching.** It should be emphasised that a vast majority of institutions regard the Bologna reforms as an opportunity to reflect upon and review their own programmes and teaching, and find that this has acted as a catalyst to internal reforms. This has often led to more rational planning of programmes - eliminating redundant or duplicated courses - and even to a complete redesign of curricula linked to the introduction of student-centred or competence based teaching and learning. The following comment from the report on a Finnish institution was echoed in a wide range of different national and institutional contexts: “*The major result so far is the ongoing work to analyse and restructure all curricula. A process of discussing, comparing and implementing measures across faculty borders has started. A key word for this process is reinforcement, as the Bologna Process has been used as a vehicle to carry out reform work which was needed with or without Bologna.*”

Nevertheless, there are important differences regarding the effect of Bologna reforms on quality. At some institutions, it was noted that the Bologna Process, with its external pressures and benchmarks, helped to focus and drive forward reforms by enabling targets to improve quality to be set and reached more quickly. However, at other institutions, it was felt that improvements in quality had not been considered strategically or in central policy-making, but that curricular reforms had rather been dominated by structural discussions concerning which course units to offer at what level.

2. INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES AT EUROPEAN HEIs

While the level of activity regarding internal quality processes at higher education institutions has clearly grown in all parts of Europe, the focus of such activity is largely restricted to teaching and learning processes. Indeed, **all institutions represented in the study sample have some form of internal quality processes with respect to teaching.** Yet only one third undertakes any internal quality improvement activity related to research (external review of research being the more frequent quality improvement tool). Internal quality reviews of administration and support services are even rarer - found in less than one-sixth of the institutions in the sample. In the category of administration and support, only student services are reviewed slightly more frequently.

2.1. Student participation in the evaluation of teaching

Examining more closely the way in which the internal reviews of teaching are conducted, it is apparent that they differ widely between institutions and countries in terms of organisation, feedback loops, student participation and perceived effectiveness.

Student evaluation questionnaires are a tool used everywhere, but there is a wide range of practice in how they are used. At many institutions, faculties and even individual professors may decide whether questionnaires are actually handed out and analysed, and can also influence whether and how the results are taken into account.

At other institutions, however, the systematic use of student questionnaires is obligatory across the whole institution, and responsibility for using information is clearly attributed to competent bodies such as quality councils or programme committees at faculty, department or institutional level. Such bodies were found at a quarter of the institutions visited. Moreover in some institutions in Belgium, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, teaching and learning units are playing an important role in quality development. These units are often responsible for the analysis of evaluation questionnaires, as well as for providing continuing professional development training and support to teachers, or helping with IT based teaching.

In more than a quarter of the institutions, student involvement went beyond filling in questionnaires to active participation in the feedback processes. This could be ensured in a number of ways, including through regular meetings between students and staff, or within committees of students and staff focused on teaching and learning. This type of practice was found at institutions visited in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. At a Finnish institution, the students even underwent an induction course to gain understanding of quality processes and of their own role in contributing to institutional quality development.

The most significant finding regarding student participation is that **there were no reports of problems with the feedback of criticisms, complaints and recommendations regarding teaching and learning in institutions where student participation is active and encouraged.** However, the opposite is true in those institutions where students are not involved in quality processes (a quarter of the institutions in the sample).

2.2. Monitoring success and drop-out

Perhaps surprisingly, given the increased attention on internal quality development, **very few institutions in the sample systematically track basic information regarding success-rates and drop-out rates of students.** If institutions are going to have strategies to improve teaching and learning, this is clearly a basic information requirement for strategic management and development which is currently lacking.

Sometimes, but rarely, detailed data is gathered at institutional level on the career choices of graduates. In other institutions such information may be gathered by individual departments or faculties but is not treated systematically across the whole institution. Again, it seems that the increased realisation of the importance of stakeholder relationships and employability has not yet deeply affected institutional monitoring processes.

2.3. Research: the use of peer review

Only one institution in three in the Trends IV sample undertook any form of internal quality improvement activities related to research, while the majority relied upon external quality procedures. However, the relationship of internal and external procedures is not clear-cut, and poses some challenges to institutions. The most central and frequent ingredient of all procedures, the peer review, can be initiated internally by the institution or externally by a national authority and most often involves both an external and an internal evaluation. Only peer review associated with submission of articles to academic journals or grant applications involves no self-evaluation. The fact that peer reviews of research are most often initiated externally, by funding authorities (as is the case in the regular reviews by the research funding authorities in Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom), grant awarding agencies, or journals, does not prevent this process from being generally regarded as the best possible quality instrument for research by universities. A few institutions have even initiated such peer reviews themselves (e.g., in Denmark, Finland, Italy).

According to universities, two problems can undermine the effectiveness of peer reviews. First, they can lose their legitimacy when the pool of available peers is too small to prevent “inbreeding” by way of quid pro quo exchanges. To tackle this problem, some smaller national systems are thus introducing more extensive international participation although this is sometimes made difficult by financial and language restrictions. Second, the success of peer review depends on the perceived quality of the peers. If they are not regarded as meeting the quality demands of the department which is to be evaluated, then their peer assessment will not be taken seriously. This is the prime reason why some internationally competitive institutions in the sample sometimes mention a preference for an internally initiated external review, to safeguard the standards against which their performance will be judged.

While being the most dominant method of assuring or enhancing quality of research, peer review of research projects and results is only one of many methods. The institutions visited in *Trends IV* highlighted a wide range of quality related processes many of which depend on the internal quality culture of the institutions and which can have a major impact on the improvement of research quality at the institution:

- Recruitment of professors and scientific staff is widely regarded as the most vital method to ensure and improve quality. Yet the power to recruit does not always lie with the institution. Moreover the ability to attract staff is greatly affected by the quality of the research environment - in terms of human and financial resources, and scientific infrastructure.
- Quite often teaching evaluations and incentives to improve are part of the re-election and promotion procedures for professors and research staff. This is the case in institutions visited in Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovak Republic and Spain, where re-election of professors or a part of the salaries may depend upon research performance. In some other countries salaries cannot be influenced by institutions but have fixed levels which are set in legislation.
- Internal distribution of research grants on the basis of both research performance and quality of the grant proposals was mentioned by a few institutions (in Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom). Such internal research funding allocation is managed in a similar manner to external grant distribution (on the basis of peer review often with external peers) and serves primarily to jump-start new research directions or provide grants more flexibly and quickly than would be possible through external funding agencies.
- Competitive resource allocation between departments, based on research performance, exist at some institutions (e.g., in the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, United Kingdom).
- Internal scrutiny of research performance indicators at institutional, faculty or departmental level seems to be a growing practice, in line with the frequent use of such quantitative indicators at national level. In several institutions (in the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom) academics and junior staff mentioned that a new mentality of mutual scrutiny of performance was developing.
- Quality monitoring of research training at doctoral level is usually dealt with at programme, department and faculty level. At the institutions or faculties which have quality councils or committees these would also address the quality of research and doctoral provision.

2.4. Administration, support service, external and international relations

While **many institutions mention occasional ad hoc evaluations of particular administrative services**, usually triggered by the perception of a particular problem or reason for change, only a sixth submit their administration and support services to regular review. However, at another sixth of the institutions in the sample, representatives mention that they are beginning to address the quality of administration and support services more regularly and systematically.

Student services were more often reviewed than other services, often with the help of student satisfaction questionnaires.

At many institutions, technology transfer or entrepreneurial support services had only been established recently and, although some isolated examples of quality processes were found, in general it was felt that evaluation of quality of such services was premature.

The quality of international relations seemed to be an issue only with respect to the growing need to concentrate on trusted well known partners, so that exchange and recognition procedures could be dealt with more smoothly and reliably.

3. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

All over Europe, higher education institutions are both expanding their internal quality arrangements and facing a growing number of external quality assurance procedures. The relationship between internal quality and external quality assurance was evaluated quite divergently across Europe. In systems where internal quality processes are still being established, the relationship between internal and external quality mechanisms seems to work well. In more established systems with intricate and more institutionalised QA processes, external quality assurance tends to be seen as more of a bureaucratic burden of limited use for institutional development.

Most importantly, **institutions find that a well developed internal quality culture should be associated with a light external quality approach.** Generally, institutions considered internal quality processes to be more improvement-oriented than external quality assurance procedures. These external procedures were felt to be more often geared toward control and compliance and less attuned to the aims, priorities and conditions under which the institutions or evaluated unit was developing.

Self-evaluation reports provide an interface between internal and external quality assurance processes. Frequently, institutional representatives mentioned that these constitute the most useful part of any quality assurance process, but only if they lead to follow up and concrete implementation.

4. RELATIVE EFFECTIVENESS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES

Many comments were made regarding the **relative effectiveness of different external quality assurance measures**, mostly with respect to teaching. The external evaluation of teaching is either examined indirectly at the level of institutions through quality audits that review the internal quality processes, or through programme evaluation, as is the case in Finland, Ireland, in recent years also the United Kingdom, and most recently in Switzerland. While programme evaluation is generally concerned with teaching outputs, programme accreditation is often reported to be predominantly focused on input and structure although exceptions to this general rule do exist. In the case of subject or programme evaluations, some positive examples of meaningful improvement-oriented processes were reported, especially concerning improvements in feedback from negative assessments. However, some institutions point out that the link to relevant research and support services is often missing when the evaluation only focuses on teaching.

Institutions were more often critical of programme accreditation, in particular objecting to the controlling, prescriptive and limiting outcomes of accreditation practices. For example, complaints were voiced about the practice of prescribing a list of subjects in which programmes can be offered or preventing interdisciplinary programmes from being established because of accreditation committees' disciplinary prejudices. Institutions see no difference whether such restrictions of their freedom to develop new programmes are set by the government or by an independent accreditation body. Often accreditation was demanded and defined by professional bodies, with no consideration of other internal quality processes at universities and thus no regard to possible synergies or overlap with institutional quality processes. This posed additional and unnecessary bureaucratic burdens to institutions.

Such problems were not, however, reported with respect to institutional quality audits. But these were seen to be useful only if they considered the aims and strategic priorities set by the institution and considered the links between teaching, research and support services. Otherwise audits were seen to run the risk of being too focused on procedures and instruments and to pay too

little attention to the most important quality concerns of the institution. This was reported as limiting their usefulness for the audited institution. Some institutional representatives also pointed to the danger of a community of quality assurance specialists justifying their existence by promoting the establishment of more and more quality assurance procedures with little regard to academic issues which should be central to the definition of quality in a given domain. Generally, while experiences with institutional audits were more positive than with accreditation, they also drew mixed reactions, from being seen as a welcome experience helping with the establishment and enhancement of internal quality development processes to being criticised for their narrow focus on procedures, stopping short of the real quality questions.

Thus, from the point of view of institutions, the debate on evaluation vs. accreditation and programme vs. institutional focus is continuing, and evolving into a more complex discussion on the best desirable mix. At national level, mixed models are gaining popularity, with quality assurance or accreditation agencies conducting reviews of institutions as well as programmes. **A majority of institutions nevertheless prefers institutional audits as they are usually lighter and more often attuned to institutional aims and strategies.**

5. LIMITS TO QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

The findings from the site visits also illustrate very forcefully that in a considerable number of HEIs pursuing a reform agenda, **the most restricting factors to quality enhancement are limited available resources and the scope of autonomy** - the extent to which institutions can decide and plan their own future.

Limits to institutional autonomy are still widespread in Europe and cover all the institutional processes that influence overall quality and profile setting, from student selection to staff recruitment and development (promotion, rewards), educational programme development, setting research priorities or internal resource allocation.

The differences among individual European countries are enormous: some countries, such as the United Kingdom, Ireland, Finland, the Netherlands, and recently also Denmark and Austria, grant wide-reaching autonomy to their universities with clear requirements of accountability. Other countries, such as Belgium (French-speaking), some Länder of Germany, and Greece impose severe restrictions on the internal governance of their institutions. Sometimes autonomy is not limited by ministerial intervention but rather by accreditation bodies, which may restrict the types of courses that can be developed and offered. However, with respect to institutional quality provisions, some form of interference by national level authorities was generally accepted by institutions as long as it did not result in a disproportionate amount of bureaucratic effort, and was generally oriented towards quality development rather than control. Such accountability demands were also much better accepted when they went hand in hand with wide-reaching institutional autonomy.

Clearly, *Trends IV* data show that the institutions with the most systematic approach to quality are also those that benefit from the greatest institutional autonomy. Conversely, the institutions with the lowest degree of autonomy have not started to develop a systematic approach to quality. In a great majority of institutions - especially those lacking autonomy - internal quality processes suffer from lack of coherence. Indeed less than a quarter of the institutions in the sample actually address their internal quality arrangements in a systematic manner. Very often quality practices can differ greatly from one faculty to the other.

There is a clear trend toward more institutional approaches to exploit synergies, economies of scale and spread models of good practice at institutions which do not suffer from low degrees of autonomy. More than a quarter of the institutions have established institutional structures to make their internal quality processes more systematic, optimise feedback, exploit synergies and exchange models of good practice across the different parts of the institution.

All over Europe, institutional representatives express a growing discontent that external quality assurance is futile when weaknesses with known solutions are revealed but then cannot be addressed for lack of funding. Many representatives believed quality assurance should only be established and further developed if there is a commitment to quality improvement once problems have been clearly identified.

Limits to quality enhancement through restricted financial resources were reported at many institutions, most frequently in the Czech Republic, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, France, Italy and Slovakia. Thus different groups at a French university pointed out that the Bologna reforms discussions had already fostered interdisciplinary programme development, led to more group work and to a better understanding of the university as a whole. But while the fact that the Bologna emphasis on flexible learning paths and learning outcomes was widely appreciated (e.g., in particular the fact that it “*assumes that students are adults capable of making choices*”), such flexible choices were made impossible because of lack of resources and classrooms. The goals of the reform were thus regarded as offering great potential for quality improvement but as being utopian.

Similar comments could be heard all over Europe, not just in relation to the Bologna reforms but also concerning other ideas with the potential for quality enhancement which could not be realised because of limited resources. Concrete measures which suffered from the lack of funding ranged from the establishment of appropriate student guidance and counselling services to the recruitment of internationally outstanding professors and the updating of research infrastructure.

The essential aim of the Bologna reforms, namely to create a European Higher Education Area which is predicated on quality and therefore attractive to its members as well as the outside world, can only be achieved if the concern for quality is not reduced to the establishment or optimisation of external quality assurance processes alone, but considers all processes of institutional development.

6. CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

- ***Following on the positive example of a few institutions, HEIs may benefit from a more systematic approach to quality improvement across the institution, exploiting synergies between evaluation of teaching and evaluation of research, and supporting services and administration. Governments and QA agencies should support such combined reviews, to ensure the link between research and teaching and the appropriateness of the existing services, as well as to enhance efficiency of evaluation procedures.***
- ***HEIs and QA agencies should cooperate in optimising the relations and coordination between internal and external quality assurance processes, to alleviate the administrative burden on institutions without reducing the value for quality improvement. In particular, external quality assurance should be reduced in direct correlation to the evidence of robust internal quality processes.***
- ***Governments should recognise that quality enhancement, as aimed for in the Bologna process, is not only pursued through quality assurance measures and procedures but often introduced through other channels of institutional development.***

QUALITY ASSURANCE - QUALITATIVE DIVERSITY?

Chapter excerpt from ESIB publication:
BOLOGNA WITH STUDENT EYES (2005)

Many countries and stakeholders see quality assurance (QA) as one of the cornerstones of the Bologna process. It is generally understood as a way not only to ensure quality but also to enhance it. It was never sought to develop one quality assurance system for Europe but rather to increase cooperation in quality assurance. The issue of mutual trust in each other's systems plays a crucial role in this respect. In order to increase the trustworthiness and functioning of quality assurance procedures ministers responsible for higher education agreed at their meeting in Berlin in 2003 that by 2005 national quality assurance systems should include:

- A definition of the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved
- Evaluation of programmes or institutions, including internal assessment, external review, participation of students and the publication of results.
- A system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures.
- International participation, co-operation and networking.

Quality Assurance is a very broad topic, with many different facets. In policymaking and evaluations a lot of attention is usually given to the technical aspects of QA, whereas the actual practices are often neglected. This survey concentrates mainly on the latter and on parts of the Berlin commitments that are generally seen as vital for students. More concretely the survey concentrates on actual practises of QA on national level as well as within HEIs and the degree of satisfaction of students on QA practices, mainly concerning student involvement and transparency of the systems.

I. NATIONAL QA SYSTEMS IN PLACE

In the countries that are surveyed, there are no national bodies for Quality Assurance or Accreditation or have only just been established in Greece, Malta, Bosnia-Herzegovina (both entities), Serbia, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Iceland, Slovenia and Croatia. In the rest of the countries a national, independently functioning QA or accreditation body has been established.

1. Consequences for the HEIs / programme

Although the actual practices of external QA vary widely within Europe – with evaluations on a programme and institutional level, with in depth reviews and audits of internal QA and management practices – in almost all countries the reviews generally lead to some changes and improvements within the HEIs. In about half of the countries a negative external evaluation / accreditation report can have consequences for financing of programmes / HEIs or degree awarding power (e.g. UK, the Netherlands, Belgium (fl), Baltic States, Norway and Sweden). However, in practice this seldom happens, it rather works as an incentive for improving quality.

Also in countries where the government does not link any direct consequences to negative results of external evaluations these often lead to improvements. In countries like Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Malta, Portugal and the Czech Republic the impression is that HEIs generally take the results of external reviews into account in further developments of education. But the extent to which it actually leads to clear improvements depends often on the willingness of individual administrators and professors.

2. Publication of results

If the results of external quality assurance or accreditation are to be accepted by all parties concerned, transparency of the process is very important. In line with the Berlin Communiqué, it should lead to a public report, accessible by all stakeholders. In more than half of the Bologna countries this is the case, namely in all Nordic and Baltic States and countries like Hungary, Belgium (fl), Austria and the UK.

Despite the commitments in the Berlin Communiqué in a number of countries, the results of external QA and accreditation are not published. In countries like Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Belgium, the Czech Republic and in the private higher education sector in many other countries a negative result is generally not published since in these cases HEIs can decide to keep it internal and/or withdraw a accreditation request.

II. INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

According to the Berlin Communiqué, the primary responsibility for QA in higher education lies with the institution itself and this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework. In line with the Berlin Communiqué, in most countries there is a high degree of autonomy for HEIs on the exact implementation of internal QA processes, with only some recommendations coming from a national level, mostly the national QA agency. This can be seen in most of the Nordic, Western, Southern and Southeastern European countries. Clearer and more detailed regulations on internal QA procedures exist in not more than 25% of the countries, like Austria, Switzerland, Estonia, Bulgaria and Hungary.

1. Internal evaluations

In practice, in most countries there indeed exists a functioning system of internal evaluations within most of the HEIs, mainly in countries where it is a legal obligation like in the Nordic countries, Austria, Switzerland, Estonia, Belgium (FI), the Netherlands, Poland, Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia, Romania, Bulgaria and the UK as well as on a more voluntary basis in countries like Hungary, Malta (but not in the polytechnics).

Although this seems to be a good score, there are still many HEIs where no functioning internal quality assessment system is in place. Amongst others in Greece, Latvia, French speaking Belgium, Portugal, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Germany, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina. Except for Latvia, Portugal and Belgium (fr), in these countries there are also no legal obligations for HEIs to implement a functioning internal QA system.

2. Improvements

The difference between functioning and not-functioning systems of internal QA lies not only in the existence of internal evaluations but also in the question if results of evaluations generally lead to improvements. According to the survey, in about half of the countries internal quality assessments generally do not lead to substantial improvements. This problem is often due to financial and time restrictions but also caused by the unwillingness of administrators and professors and is clearly noticeable in the abovementioned countries with a lacking evaluation system but also in many cases in Italy, Croatia, Slovenia, Romania, the Netherlands and Denmark.

3. Different levels

The levels within HEIs on which quality assessment usually takes place vary widely within Europe, within individual countries and sometimes even between different parts of an HEI. Generally it can be said that mostly not all levels (institutional, faculty, programme and course) within HEIs are being assessed as part of internal QA procedures. From the countries in which internal evaluations actually take place, all levels within the HEIs get attention in Iceland, Norway, Bulgaria, Sweden, Flanders and the UK. In Finland, Macedonia, Slovakia and Slovenia generally only the institutional and faculty level are being assessed and in Estonia, Romania and Denmark mainly the study programmes and individual courses. In Hungary, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Malta usually only courses are being regularly evaluated within the HEIs.

III. INVOLVEMENT OF STUDENTS IN QUALITY ASSURANCE

As can be seen from the Berlin Communiqué, evaluation processes should have a very broad scope, including internal as well as external processes of quality assurance. Following the Berlin Communiqué and existing good practices, also student participation needs to be assessed from these

different aspects. For that reason there is the necessity to look at the process of participation of students within the governance of national bodies for quality assurance / accreditation, participation within external evaluations of programmes and/or HEIs and participation in evaluations within HEIs.

1. Participation of students within the governance of national bodies for QA/A

From the countries that do have a national body for QA, slightly more than half have students represented in the governing board (Norway, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, UK, Belgium (fr), Germany, Austria, Portugal and Italy). In the UK and Hungary students are not full members of the board of the QA agency but only have a role as observers.

Other countries with a functioning national QA agency exclude students from the governing board (Denmark, Latvia, Belgium (fl), the Netherlands, Poland, the Czech republic, Switzerland, Romania and Bulgaria).

2. Participation of students within teams for external review

An important part of QA processes in most countries is the external review of programmes or HEIs, generally done by teams of external reviewers. Only in a limited number of countries these teams include students as full members (Norway, Sweden, Finland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Flanders, Hungary, Scotland and sometimes in Germany where it differs by QA agency). In other countries where external reviews take place, like the UK (except Scotland), Denmark, Portugal, Italy, Belgium (fr), Latvia, Estonia, Malta, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Switzerland there is no student represented in the review team.

It should be noted that external reviews are not always done under the supervision of a national agency. In some countries where a national QA system has not been established yet, like in Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, nation wide external evaluations have been carried out by international organisations as the Council of Europe and the European University Association. The information on student participation in external evaluations in specific countries can thus also relate to those evaluations. No nation wide external reviews have recently taken place in Poland, Croatia, Bulgaria, Macedonia and Romania.

3. Extent of consultation or involvement of students during external reviews

According to the Bologna Process, external reviews are supposed to be based on internal assessments and other information provided by those actually involved in the programme or HEI under review. This obviously should include students.

The involvement of students is perceived as good (i.e. equal to the involvement of other internal stakeholders) in only a limited number of countries, namely Norway, Sweden, Finland, the UK, Latvia, the Netherlands, Belgium (fl) and Hungary. In these countries student representatives write their own submission to the team, are involved in the creation of (parts of) the final internal self-study report, or responsible for specific student surveys. Often the external teams have several meetings with students as well.

In other countries students consider their involvement as too limited, mainly because they are only consulted via a survey or short meetings, official student representatives are not involved and they are not part of the actual internal self-assessment. These criticisms have come from Germany, Estonia, Denmark, Latvia, Switzerland, the Czech Republic, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Students are not consulted at all in the external reviews that take place in Italy and Malta.

4. Student involvement within internal evaluations

The processes of internal quality assurance, including the involvement of students in internal evaluations, fall almost always under the autonomy of HEIs. Therefore the existence of evaluations, their extensiveness and the involvement of students not only varies between countries, but often also between HEIs within a country. Nevertheless, some general observations can be made.

Formally it can be said that if internal reviews exist within HEIs, in most cases students are asked about their opinions. But there is a great variety in the comprehensiveness of student evaluations, the levels within the HEI they are undertaken, whether the results lead to improvements or if they just end up in a forgotten desk drawer.

At all levels of internal reviews (institution, faculty, programme and course) students are asked for their opinion in the Nordic countries (except Iceland), UK, Belgium (fl), Hungary and Bulgaria. It is foreseen within the new higher education law in Slovenia, but not yet in practice. Students are in practice mostly only involved in evaluations on the course level in the Netherlands, Iceland, Germany, Switzerland, Estonia and Italy. In the Czech Republic and Macedonia students are only involved in evaluations at the faculty level. Students are rarely asked for their opinion in evaluations in Poland, Latvia and Malta.

Most problematic are countries, where students are never asked for their opinion, even if some mechanisms of internal QA exist on all or only one level. This is the case in Bosnia-Herzegovina (both entities), where students also do their own evaluation, but never get any response, Serbia, Greece and Romania.

5. Overall student participation in Quality Assurance

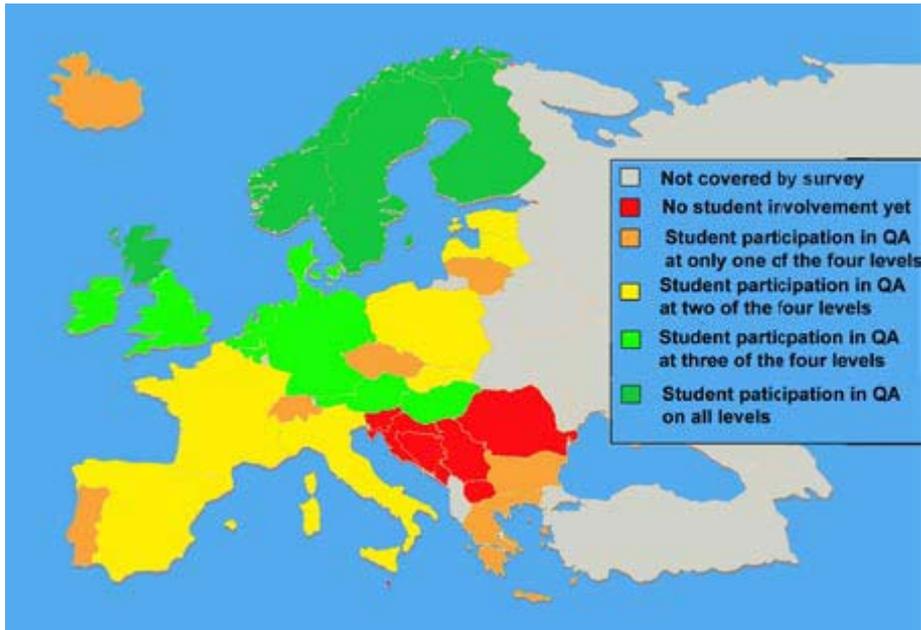
It can be concluded that except from a few good examples (Norway, Sweden, Finland) the vast majority of the countries that are part of the Bologna Process have not properly implemented the participation of students in evaluation processes on all relevant levels.

The legislation of internal student evaluation management and the involvement of students in self-assessments as part of external reviews do not exist in the majority of countries but falls usually under the autonomy of HEIs. Therefore, the vast majority of good practices of participation in evaluation processes are made voluntary by individual HEIs. At the same time, of course, the vast majority of bad practices are also the result of decisions of individual HEIs. There are a few countries / HEIs where the opinion and experience of students is asked for on all levels within the institution. On the other hand usually they evaluate nothing more than their individual courses, neglecting the evaluation of programmes, faculties and the HEI as a whole. In this respect the worst practices exist in the countries of South-eastern Europe (although Bulgaria seems to be a more positive exception), where students are generally not included and/or student evaluations do not exist at all. The good practices with regard to student participation in internal QA seem to be the Nordic countries (except Iceland), UK, Belgium (fl), Hungary and Bulgaria.

Furthermore, students are seldom included in teams of external reviews. Although in half of the countries students have a place in the board of the national QA agency, the majority of countries do not include a student in the external review teams and the consultation of students by these teams is often seen as insufficient. In the majority of cases students were consulted only through surveys or interviews and not on a regular/structural basis. The good practises with regard to student participation in external QA seem to be Norway, Sweden, Finland and Scotland.

Taking the whole system of QA, including its internal and external dimension, student involvement is only adequately implemented in 4 countries that were part of this survey: Norway, Sweden, Finland and Scotland.

1. **(Green)** Countries with student involvement in QA on all levels
2. **(Green)** Countries with student involvement in QA on 2 out of 4 levels
3. **(Yellow)** Countries with student involvement in QA on 2 out of 4 levels
4. **(Orange)** Countries with student involvement in QA on 1 out of 4 levels
5. **(Red)** Countries without student involvement in QA



Map 3: Student participation in quality assurance

IV. CONCLUSION:

Although it is clear that in none of the Bologna countries the whole system of internal and external QA functions perfectly, some countries seem to be on the right track. Student organisations in the Nordic countries, Belgium (fl) and the UK are rather satisfied with their national QA systems, while in Austria, Belgium (fr), Bulgaria and Slovenia currently QA systems are being developed that seem promising. Despite the fact that these countries show a lot of diversity with regards to their systems of quality assurance and the level of autonomy of the HEIs, the binding factor of these countries is that the level of student involvement within QA is higher than in most other countries although it is still a weak point that needs to be improved.

At the same time, in all the other countries students are unsatisfied with the way QA is functioning, or in many cases not functioning at all. Most obstacles for a genuine system of QA that still exist have already been mentioned and can be completed towards the following list of elements students repeatedly mention they want to have changed:

- Lack of QA system
- Actual student involvement in all levels and all steps of Quality Assurance
- Publication of all results
- International participation within QA
- More financial and human resources for the national QA agency and for external reviews.
- More transparency concerning procedures
- Clearer consequences connected to evaluations.
- Public justification of follow up of both internal as external QA what is really happening and to justify why something is nothing happening.
- More attention for study conditions, student workload and teaching in the QA processes
- Quality assessments on all levels within the HEI.

QUALITY ENHANCEMENT AT PROGRAMME LEVEL: THE TUNING APPROACH

Chapter excerpt from Tuning report:
TUNING EDUCATIONAL STRUCTURES II (2005)

1. INTRODUCTION

The Tuning project recognises the growing interest in *quality* in higher education all over Europe. There is a growth in the number of quality units at institutional level looking at internal quality as well as an increase in newly created quality agencies evaluating quality from the perspective of external agents. Furthermore, there is a firm belief among the relevant players that quality is at the heart of the construction of the European Higher Education Area. This is reflected in the ENQA policy paper *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* which has been endorsed by EUA, EURASHE and ESIB and approved at the Bergen summit by the European ministers of education.

The term 'quality' in higher education is often ambiguous. It is commonly used as a kind of short hand, to represent different understandings of what the essential components of quality are, and what the best methods of creating or guaranteeing their existence might be. Tuning keeps in mind that the general objective of the entire higher education sector must be to create, enhance and guarantee the best and most appropriate experience of higher education possible for the student. Different strategies and various actors, working at different levels of the process certainly must be involved in the process of guaranteeing that quality in this general sense is achieved. However Tuning members believe that in final analysis the responsibility for developing, maintaining and increasing quality in higher education lies with Universities and their staff, with the contribution of students and other stakeholders. Other actors and levels have important roles in stimulating and in checking achievement, but if academic staff and students are not deeply, sincerely and intelligently involved in developing and enhancing quality, outside agents will be able register the existence of problems, but they will not be able themselves to create and implement quality programmes.

Tuning's specific task is to create common understanding and appropriate tools for Universities to develop, maintain and improve quality in higher education programmes in the broad European context. In this chapter we will concentrate on what we see as the most important strategy towards building mutual trust and understanding, as well as ensuring recognition of qualifications and periods of study, that is, developing quality at the level of study programmes.

In the Bologna context any programme should be of relevance for society, lead to employment, prepare for citizenship, be recognized by academia and sufficiently transparent and comparable to facilitate mobility and recognition. Furthermore, it should be understood, valued by and thought to be sufficiently attractive to appeal to significant numbers of good students, either in a national and/or an international context. The adequacy of the approach to achieve the objectives, consistency and coherence of the constituent elements of the programme are further proofs of its quality.

The Tuning project has provided a foundation for quality enhancement by developing appropriate transparency tools and a dialogue with stakeholders. The creation of an environment where more than 135 acknowledged European experts from nine different subject areas have been able to work together constructively, has allowed them to reach points of understanding and convergence; they have been able to reflect jointly on the meaning of quality, and respond to its growing importance in the higher education sector, offering guidance especially for the design, implementation and delivery of curricula.

Among the various criteria used in judging quality, we find the terms 'fitness **for** purpose' and 'fitness **of** purpose'. The former, often used in quality assurance activities, means determining whether the academic strategies are suitable for achieving the declared aims of a programme. The latter means determining whether the aims of the programme are suitable or not. In the Tuning view, to develop true quality, 'fitness for purpose' has meaning only when the fitness of purpose itself is thoroughly established and demonstrated. As a consequence Tuning holds that quality in programme design and

delivery means guaranteeing both “fitness for purpose” (i.e. suitability for achieving the declared aims of each programme), and “fitness of purpose” (i.e. suitability of the aims of each programme: these should meet the expectations of students, academic staff, employers and the broader ones foreseen in the Bologna Process). Guaranteeing “fitness of purpose’ requires a strong connection with research and academic standards as well as a consideration of employability which is only implicit in the “fitness for purpose” definition.

Tuning sees its particular role as that of encouraging *quality enhancement* at programme level and providing tools to develop it. As a working definition for Tuning, *quality enhancement* means *a constant effort to improve quality of programme design, implementation and delivery*. *The Tuning approach is based on a set of consistent features:*

- *an identified and agreed need:*
- *a well described profile:*
- *corresponding learning outcomes phrased in terms of competence:*
- *the correct allocation of ECTS credits to the units of the programme:*
- *appropriate approaches to teaching, learning and assessment.*

All this delineates and depends on establishing an on-going process based on built-in quality enhancement mechanisms and an awareness of its importance, that is, a “quality culture”.

2. TUNING METHODOLOGY

The Tuning project has drawn attention to the importance of competences as the basis for the design, implementation and delivery of study programmes. The concept of competences implies the use of learning outcomes as well as credits, preferably ECTS credits, as guiding principles. Tuning distinguishes subject specific competences and generic competences. According to the Tuning methodology learning outcomes should be expressed in terms of competences. Learning outcomes are statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completion of learning. They can refer to a single course unit or module or else to a period of studies, for example, a first or a second cycle programme. Learning outcomes specify the requirements for award of credit. Learning outcomes are formulated by academic staff. Competences represent a dynamic combination of knowledge, understanding, skills and abilities. Fostering competences is the object of educational programmes. Competences are formed in various course units and assessed at different stages. Competences are obtained by the student. Competences can be developed by the student to a higher (or lower) degree than expected by the learning outcomes. The level to which competences are obtained is expressed in a mark or a grade.

Study programmes which have been set up according to the Tuning methodology are output- oriented and, preferably, modularized. A modular system has the advantage of being transparent. It will promote and facilitate finding of a correct balance between learning outcomes and their related student workload expressed in ECTS credits.

For Tuning the design of a programme is a decisive element for its quality and its relevance for society. Badly designed programmes will not only have a negative effect on the output of the number of successful students and the average time to finish the programme, but also on the level of citizenship and employability of its graduates. As part of the first phase of the project, Tuning developed a step by step approach for designing a study programme³. This model identifies the following key elements:

- Necessary resources must be available;
- A need must be demonstrated and be established through a consultation process of relevant stakeholders;
- The degree profile must be well described;
- A set of desired learning outcomes have to be identified and expressed in terms of generic and subject specific competences;

³ Julia Gonzalez and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures. Final Report. Phase One* (Bilbao- Groningen, 2003, p. 51.

- Academic content (knowledge, understanding, skills) and structure (modules and credits) must be established and described;
- Appropriate teaching, learning and assessment strategies to achieve the desired learning outcomes must be identified;
- An appropriate evaluation and quality assurance and enhancement system focussing in particular on the consistency and implementation of the curriculum as a whole must be set up.

It must be remembered that each programme is a unit with its own identity, defined aims and purpose. Therefore, quality indicators need to be built from within as a normal and substantial element, not in the sense that they should be standardised norms, but rather that they should be criteria which respond to the uniqueness and coherency of the specific plan.⁴

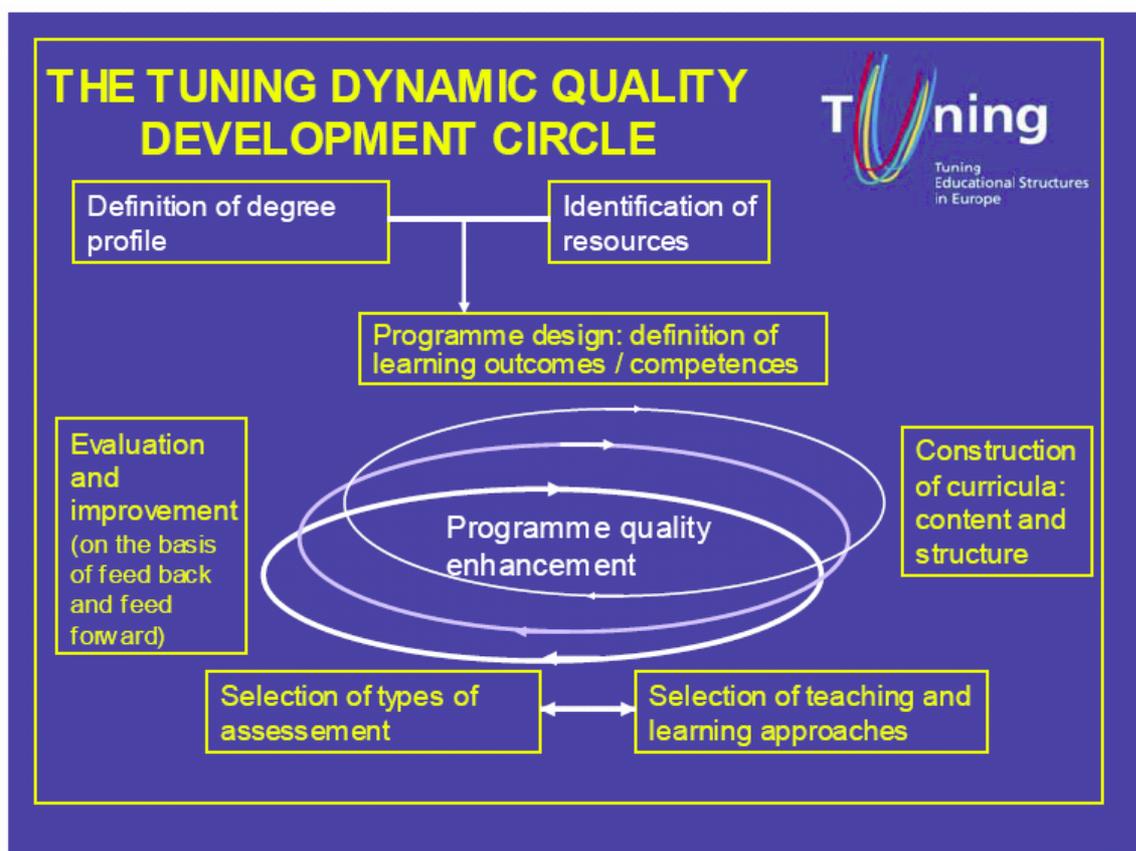
In the framework of this paper it seems useful to discuss the elements listed above in greater detail:

1. A pre-condition for delivering a programme is the availability of **resources**. The quality of these resources directly affects the quality of the programme. Resources include the availability and quality of academic staff, supporting staff and, in the case of workplace learning, the workplace supervisors. The environmental conditions and facilities available for teaching and research are also relevant. Both require permanent monitoring and improvement. In the case of academic staff this means for example that opportunities are made available and promoted for making staff acquainted with new approaches to learning and teaching.
2. To demonstrate the **need** for a degree programme a broad consultation process is required. This consultation process should not only include the academic community, but also professionals and professional bodies and employers and other stakeholders. To obtain useful information Tuning has developed a set of questionnaires focussing on generic as well as subject specific competences. The outcome of these questionnaires forms input for the definition of international reference points for a subject area. Other input comes from the (global) academic community of the specific field. This community has a decisive role in defining the academic reference points for this field. However, in the end it is the academic staff responsible for the programme, taking into account the identified reference points and the orientation and competences of available members of staff, which actually designs the programme. Although diversity of competences and orientation is necessary in order to have quality in departments, faculties and universities, there must also be coordinating structures which guarantee coherence and make **change** possible. Crucial in this respect are the so-called change agents, e.g. directors of studies, heads of departments, executive boards and councils etc., responsible for the design, approval, delivery and management of programmes. Changes are difficult to implement when they are not widely supported. Therefore, a broad spectrum of and educational approach is understood and supported by both staff and students.
3. For each study programme there should be a degree or qualifications **profile** that clearly defines the aims and purposes of the programme. Further clarity can be obtained by formulating these aims in the form of intended learning outcomes (statements of what the graduates should know, understand and be able to do), expressed in terms of the subject-specific and generic competences to be achieved. Curriculum design and student assessment should be coherent with this degree profile.
4. The curriculum design process should consider the **academic content** and **level** to be reached but it should also consider that one major goal in higher education is to promote autonomous learning and autonomous learners – which has implications for teaching and learning methods and the overall student **workload** in terms of ECTS credits. The curriculum should not overload students with excessive and redundant content. Curriculum design should consider the employability of graduates and the development of citizenship as well as their academic and intellectual training.

⁴ Jones, Gareth (2003). Discussion Paper. Physic group. Imperial College, London, based on similar principles adopted in the IDEA League. See also: QAA, *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education. Section 7: programme approval, monitoring and review* (London, May 2000).

- An **evaluation** scheme should be in place to monitor and review the operation of each study programme. The monitoring process should involve the systematic collection and analysis of statistical information on key indicators such as examination success rates, progression of students to employment or higher degrees, student recruitment numbers, response to evaluative questionnaires, feedback of partner institutions, etc. The results should be made known within the university. Various **feedback and feedforward loops** should be in operation. These should involve students, alumni and academic staff, operating on the same or different time-scales. In particular, there should be provision for obtaining and acting on information from student questionnaires and from student representatives. The purpose of the feedback loops is to correct deficiencies in delivery and/or design of the curriculum. The feedforward loops are intended to identify expected developments, which should be taken into account when improving and/or developing programmes. In the case of programmes incorporating workplace learning or professional competences, feedback should be obtained from the stakeholders involved as to the suitability in practice of the students' competences and hence their employability.

The above listed principles for setting-up and improvement of programmes have been visualized by Tuning in the *dynamic quality development circle*: already presented above, in the discussion of Tuning methodology in chapter 1.



This model is based on the assumption that programmes can and should be enhanced on the basis not only of feedback but also of feed forward by taking into account developments in society as well as the academic field concerned. This is illustrated by the progressive spiral loops in the diagram.

In order to facilitate institutions in programme design, implementation and delivery, Tuning has developed a comprehensive **List of key questions** to be considered in initiating or developing a degree programme. Its usefulness has already been validated in practice as is shown in the examples annexed to this paper. This tool is included in this paper as Annex 1

Because society is always changing and academic fields are developing, education has to be a dynamic process. Tuning is convinced that periodic external or internal quality assurance checks are insufficient for developing and maintaining true quality. The focus, rather, should be on the constant improvement and updating of the programme. It follows that the evaluation process(es) must be carried out in a particular way. Individual teaching and learning units / modules should not be assessed and evaluated by themselves, but rather in the framework of the overall programme.

A curriculum evaluation can be considered under three main headings:

- the educational process,
- the educational outcome and
- the means and facilities required for programme delivery.

Each of these main headings contains a number of elements to be considered:

Educational Process:

- degree profile (aims of the educational programme)
- learning outcomes to be achieved and competences to be obtained
- degree/educational programme structure and order of programme components to ensure progression
- coherence of degree / educational programme
- division of workload over the semester and the academic year
- feasibility of programme (check)
- teaching, learning and assessment methods
- connection with secondary education
- international cooperation and student mobility

Educational outcome:

- study rate, cessation of study and switch-overs (output)
- output of 1st and 2nd cycle
- employability

Means and facilities required:

- structural and technical facilities
- staff and material means
- student support: student counsellors

The different elements identified above are proposed in a **Checklist for Curriculum Evaluation**. The checklist is based on 14 'premises' or statements which describe an ideal situation. In practice this ideal will be difficult to realize, but it is *the responsibility of academic staff and students* to come as close to it as possible. The Checklist is annexed to this chapter as Annex 2. It can be used in combination with the **List of Key Questions** included as Annex 1. Both should be seen as practical tools to help programme committees to design, implement, deliver, monitor and enhance study programmes.

3. TUNING'S FURTHER ROLE IN QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

Besides offering methodological frameworks and practical tools for the design, implementation and delivery of study programmes, Tuning has a further role in that it is a pan-European network of academics. The potential role of networks with regard to the issue of quality is mentioned in the Berlin Communiqué. Tuning is a network of academics representing both European countries and their own institutions, which formally selected them for the project. The key role of academics within institutions is stressed in the Trends III report, where it is said:

"If the enormous potential of using the Bologna objectives as a trigger for long-needed, fundamental and sustainable reforms of higher education in Europe is not to be wasted, the voice of the academics, within the institutions, will need to be heard and listened to more directly in the Bologna Process".⁵

Networks of academics can significantly contribute to the appreciation of the value of quality as well as to the elaboration of concepts in terms that are meaningful in different cultural contexts. This, in relation with quality, is a great asset, as the creation of shared meanings can contribute greatly to the development of a quality-oriented European Higher Education Area. Networks can also have an effective role in the dissemination and socialization of these concepts.

The Tuning project works in a European, transnational context, where recognition is one of the central issues. Recognition based on comparability and transparency is at the core of the Tuning project. A basic task of Tuning is to provide useful reference points for creating comparable, readable, programmes based on degree profiles described in a language of learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are expressed in terms of generic and subject-specific competences, with a clear definition of level and a well-focused teaching, learning and assessment approach. This is a significant step forward along the path towards recognition, as it provides a basis on which to:

- Formulate reference points based on internationally shared concepts and contents regarding what constitutes each subject area in the broad sense, distinguishing specializations and study programmes based on mapping;
- Develop mutually shared criteria and methodologies regarding quality assurance at programme level;
- Offer elements of comparability at national and international level;
- Build trust in internal evaluation systems that are mutually understood and jointly built;
- Enhance interest for recognition procedures at programme level within the institutions.;
- Facilitate ENICS and NARICS in their work of recognizing the degrees;
- Use available resources effectively to develop systems of reference and data keeping which can be compared and understood in the different countries.

As a transnational network, Tuning provides a unique platform for implementing the *principles* which have already been identified as *underpinning quality in European higher education*:

Relevance

In a student-centred educational system obviously a key value for any degree programme is its relevance for students as well as society. A programme should be based on academic, professional and social development, intellectual endeavour, employment and citizenship in an European environment. Being competence-based, the Tuning approach facilitates dialogue with employers and social actors. It pursues the identification of relevant academic and professional profiles and demands clarity about the needs that degree programmes intend to meet.

Comparability and compatibility

Using the Tuning methodology European degree programmes can be designed as compatible and comparable with other European programmes, through the use of common reference points, jointly agreed and expressed in generic and subject related competences. This methodology allows for true comparability, while showing a clear respect for the diversity of curricula, paths of learning and cultural ethos. The inclusion and development of ECTS also provides higher levels of comparability and compatibility through the use of student workload as a tool for planning and monitoring whole degree programmes as well as their component parts.

Transparency

This is a necessary characteristic of any study programme and must be built into it from the beginning]. There must be transparency in the outcomes, in the process, in the learning resources, in the quality systems and in data maintenance. Transparency is connected to readability, requiring the use of a language which can be understood by students, employers and other stakeholders alike in a transnational society. Transparency includes a correct use of ECTS credits for defining student workload and of the Diploma Supplement as well as of the other ECTS tools.

⁵ "Trends III, Conclusions". (op.cit.)

Mobility and transnational education

The creation of the European Higher Education Area requires a reliable and high quality mobility system. In turn, the experience of mobility contributes greatly to the full development of a strong and vital European Higher Education Area. Physical mobility, for well-structured periods of study as well as for complete degree programmes, increases quality with respect to the European dimension of education, the capacity for professional employment in the European labour market and European citizenship. Transnational education is a powerful force for bringing institutions together and for developing common quality enhancement mechanisms.

A high quality system of mobility must guarantee full recognition of periods of studies and degrees, as well as appropriateness for the student of the activities undertaken at a host institution. ECTS is the key system on which to build recognition. Tuning has facilitated recognition by fully developing the ECTS accumulation function, through the consistent use of learning outcomes, expressed in terms of competences, as well as workload.

Attractiveness

In a European education area which seeks to be attractive to third countries quality must be guaranteed. The quality mechanisms developed at the national level by the different countries must be combined and further developed in order to be perceived and understood as a European system. The Tuning project provides a quality enhancing methodology for designing degree profiles and developing curricula, including those for joint degrees, formulating learning outcomes and competence and measuring student workload. It already provides a common language for the teaching, learning and assessment of competences, which will be further developed to include quality indicators.

Universities are creating their own methods and systems for the development of an internal quality culture. They need to monitor the start-up and the development of their academic activities and programmes in a way which is coherent with core academic values and with their specific mission.⁶ Tuning provides an approach for designing or redesigning and developing study programmes according to the tenets of the Bologna process.

The general results of Tuning provide useful input for all Higher Education institutions, while the results regarding subject areas offer specific European reference points which can be used for quality enhancement at disciplinary level.

The subject area/disciplinary level is the appropriate context for:

- using the experience of academics representing different educational traditions;
- requesting the views of professional bodies and other related stakeholders in each field, thus maintaining a dynamic dialogue about social relevance and adequacy;
- focussing on developments in each subject area, thus developing a dynamic approach to thresholds and reference points;
- relating courses and degrees to maps of professions and academic and professional profiles in an international context;
- promoting a shared vision of quality development within a subject area while recognising and respecting the diversity of the approaches being used;
- comparing curricula and approaches to learning, teaching and assessment, in order to map the areas, facilitate mutual understanding, identify core competences and common standards at the different levels;
- encouraging employability studies at the European level with an emphasis on diversity and innovation;
- contributing significantly to the development of cycle(level) descriptors used in the construction of national and European Frameworks of Qualifications.

It is within a subject-area that the level of academic development of a programme can be best understood and measured in terms of quantity as well as quality.

⁶ Surssock, Andrée, 'Reflection from the Higher Education Institutions Point of View. Accreditation and quality Culture on the European Dimension of Quality', *Working on the European Dimension of Quality. Report of the conference on quality assurance in higher education as part of the Bologna process Amsterdam, 12-13 March 2002*, eds. by Don F. Westerheijden and Marlies Leegwater, Zoetermeer, 2003 .

4. SOME PRACTICAL TOOLS AND EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

In this chapter, the importance of the development of a quality culture at programme level is stressed, focussing on design, implementation and delivery. Different elements around which such a culture have been identified. Special attention is given to the role of Tuning in this respect. Two practical tools, already been mentioned above and annexed to this paper: will be useful in the process of designing or redesigning, improving and evaluating curricula. These are the *Tuning List of Key Questions* (Annex 1) meant as a basic tool for programme design, delivery, maintenance, monitoring and improvement in a national as well as an international setting. Annex 2 offers a *Tuning Checklist for Evaluating Curricula*. A third annex offers five examples of good practice, showing how the Tuning approach or a number of its elements can be and have been used in practice. The first three examples show how the Tuning approach can be used to (re)design study programmes according to the Bologna three cycle system at institutional and faculty level as well as at the level of a department and a study programme. The last two examples focus on the evaluation process. What all have in common is the objective to enhance the quality of study programmes in a coherent and transparent way.

The first example is that of Groningen University, in particular the Faculty of Arts, where in a systematic way a large number of study programmes have been redesigned according to the basic assumptions of the Bologna three cycle structure by using the Tuning approach. It offers – in more general terms – an overview of the steps that have been made during the process of redesigning, planning and implementing the new bachelor and master programmes. As a follow-up of the reform process the Faculty of Arts developed its own Tuning based internal quality culture system which became operational in the Spring of 2005.

The second example, presented by the Department of History of the University of Coimbra shows, at departmental level the usefulness of the Tuning methodology for redefining a study programme (History in this case), on the basis of a profile and related learning outcomes. It also makes clear the relevance of this approach for assuring programme quality.

The third example gives an overview of the principles underlying university degree programme design and quality management as developed and used in the Physics Department of Imperial College London, which were subsequently adopted and enhanced by the IDEA League. These principles are fully in accordance with the Tuning approach concerning curriculum design, delivery and enhancement.

The fourth example, developed by the University of Helsinki, offers a methodology for the enhancement of the quality of study programmes on the basis of an evaluation matrix. The matrix focusses on eight areas of quality or results: teaching and research, teaching goals, leadership of teaching, teaching, learning results (including assessment), resources, feedback and follow and postgraduate studies. It distinguishes four levels of quality: only satisfactory, needs developing, good and excellent.

The University of Deusto offers the fifth example of good practice. This example shows how in a systematic way competences can be evaluated. The generic competence 'teamwork' has been chosen as an example of this approach.

5. USING TUNING TO ENHANCE QUALITY IN PROGRAMME DELIVERY AND DESIGN

To sum up, Tuning offers powerful tools for enhancing quality in programme design and delivery. Of course, quality is also affected by elements depending on national, local or institutional contexts. Nonetheless Tuning findings and Tuning tools can be used by institutions and their staff everywhere to manage programme development in the Bologna context in an effective way that fosters learner-centred cultures.

Tuning provides an overall framework for developing student-centred degree programmes. It shows how to design programmes with full consideration the final result - that is, how the graduate will be equipped for life in the real world after completing the learning process - while keeping in mind professional and personal development as well as citizenship. It also makes it possible to describe

programmes by using a language that is understood in the same way across Europe and beyond, thus ensuring comparability, transparency and attractiveness.

In fact, Tuning's starting point is to design programmes which can achieve meaningful learning outcomes within a given time framework. Learning outcomes are not formulated in terms of disciplinary contents but rather in terms of knowledge and abilities acquired. Such knowledge and abilities are expressed and conceptualised as subject specific and generic competences, that is, what a student will know and be able to do at the end of a given learning process.

The Tuning competence-based approach makes it possible to consult stakeholders, including students, and to describe in clear language what the specific goals of each programme are. These 'goals' constitute the degree profile, which is connected to the professional role the graduate is expected to carry out and to the academic standards s/he is expected to achieve in the subject area. By using workload-based credits, learning and teaching activities can be organized in a consistent and efficient way.

Any degree programme must develop subject specific competences, that is, knowledge, skills, abilities and values, specifically needed for the subject area(s). Tuning already provides discipline-based reference points for subject specific competences in many subject areas: it has established an approach and a common language through which similar tools are being developed for the remaining subject areas.

Each of the subject areas already involved in Tuning has also defined the level to which the various competences must be developed in a first or a second cycle degree. These are general descriptions which can be used for reference in any institution or in any country, while respecting any national or local academic tradition and any cultural, economic or social consideration. In the future, Tuning expects to produce cycle-level descriptors for the third or doctoral cycle as well.

Particularly novel in Tuning is the focus on 'generic competences', which until now have not been explicitly taken into account in most academic programmes. For each programme choices will be made about which generic competences are most relevant for its graduates and appropriate learning/teaching/assessment activities will be organised on that basis. Tuning not only provides a common language for defining generic competences; it also furnishes many concrete examples from a wide variety of subject areas on how to foster and enhance them.

Naturally, in planning learning and teaching activities to achieve the intended learning outcomes, institutions must be constantly aware of the time framework established. Workload-based ECTS credits make it possible to plan activities effectively as they take into account all the time that must be dedicated to learning, teaching and assessment activities and hence provide a crucial tool for effective programming.

ECTS credits are only one of the Tuning tools for creating environments in which the necessary learning outcomes can be achieved. Each country, each discipline and even each institution has its own teaching/learning and assessment tradition. Tuning has put these traditions into contact: by sharing knowledge and experience, a wide range of effective methods and techniques for forming individual competences has been gathered and described. This material concerns both subject specific and generic competences and comes from many subject areas. It is available for institutions to use, in order to develop their own approaches. Tuning findings indicate that using a variety of approaches to learning and teaching in each programme gives the best results.

Assessment should be the crucial tool for understanding whether a degree programme is successful. It should be based on ascertaining whether the learner has actually achieved the planned goals. Since these are formulated in terms of learning outcomes expressed in competences, assessment must be conceptualised and organised in such a way as to evaluate to what extent those competences have been achieved.

Again Tuning has gathered and elaborated examples of good practice coming from a variety of countries and subject areas. These are available for institutions and can be utilised to design assessment methods suitable to a competence-based approach.

Naturally, programme design and delivery must be continually monitored and evaluated to find out whether the aims are actually being achieved and whether they continue to be appropriate or should take into account changes and developments in the subject areas and in society. An increasingly important element will be changes and development in each subject area in the pan-European context. The Tuning tools and approach will allow institutions to monitor, evaluate and improve both their own programmes and their joint and international degree programmes in this broader context. Thus Tuning provides a path for quality enhancement at programme level.

Excerpts from ENQA (2003) publication:

Quality procedures in European Higher Education

*** This publication will be updated by ENQA in 2007***

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council Recommendation of 24 September 1998 on European Cooperation in Quality Assurance in Higher Education suggests that member states establish quality assurance systems for higher education. The systems should be based on certain characteristics identified as common to quality assurance systems, including: The creation of an autonomous body for quality assurance, targeted utilization of internal and/or external aspects of quality assurance, the involvement of various stakeholders, and the publication of results.

The Council Recommendation proceeds to identify these elements in the context of a process involving independent quality assurance organisations, an internal self-examination component and an external composed based by appraisal and visit by external experts and the publication of a report. This is in fact the so-called four-stage model already introduced in 1994-95 as the methodological framework of the European Pilot Projects and in the Status Report of 1998 later identified and analysed in its various national interpretations.

In 2001 ENQA in cooperation with the European Commission decided to re-examine the state of the art of the European Quality Assurance four years after the recommendation was issued and the status report published.

The aim of the resulting project is to describe the methodological state-of-the-art in general terms in all ENQA member countries and associated member countries. The project focuses on the level, scope and methods of evaluation used. The method employed is a questionnaire filled in by 34 quality assurance agencies in 23 countries. Fourteen of these agencies cover both the university and the non-university sectors, while another 14 only cover higher education at universities. The remaining 6 agencies cover only non-university higher education.

2.1 The quality assurance agencies

The results of the survey demonstrate that since 1998, European quality assurance has extended in scope and in terms of the emergence of new European agencies. In most European countries autonomous quality assurance agencies have been established on national or regional level. The phenomenon is most common in the university sector (28 agencies in this survey) but also the non-university sector is being embraced by quality assurance (20 agencies in this survey). Some agencies cover both sectors; some agencies only cover one sector or the other. This difference in organisation typically finds its explanation in the structures of the national higher educational systems.

The survey shows that the quality assurance agencies still and foremost perform quality assurance and/or enhancement in the traditional sense as documented in the pilot projects from 1995, but the tasks have expanded. The vast majority of the participating agencies answer that quality assurance is both the overall main function of the agency as well as the predominant objective of the performed evaluation activities.

But the survey also points at a tendency that the agencies to an increasing degree provide expert opinions and advise to both government and higher education institutions and investigate and even decide on certain legal matters pertaining the HE institutions. This is reflected in the fact that 4/5 of the agencies mentions 'Disseminating knowledge and information' as a function of the agency, and half the agencies mentions 'accreditation' as a function of the agency.

The appearance of accreditation agencies and hence the performance of accreditation activities go hand in hand with an increased focus on accountability as objective of the performed activities. ¾ of the participating agencies mention it as an objective of the activities, and the same is the case with transparency. Also comparability - nationally as well as internationally - is a highly emphasized objective.

Most agencies have a board or a council, and all these have some kind of academic board members. In 2/3 of the cases the higher education institutions are represented among these academic board members. In half the cases labour market representatives are on the board, in 1/3 of the cases students are on the board and in 2/5 of the cases government is represented. The main source of funding of the evaluation activities is the government, but also the higher education institutions are in some way or another mentioned as source of funding in 1/3 of the cases.

There is a tendency that the board/council is more multifaceted in the EU/EFTA countries than in the associated countries, but the funding situation does not seem to differ much according to geography.

2.2 Types of evaluation in European quality assurance

The results of the survey show that European quality assurance can be identified as based on eight main types of evaluation. The survey also demonstrates that most agencies carry out several types of evaluation. It is shown that the principal types⁷ of evaluation used in European quality assurance are 'accreditation of programmes' and 'evaluation of programmes'. The majority of the participating agencies use both on a regular basis.

In general programmes are the most frequently chosen focus of the evaluation activities. This is especially pronounced in the field of non-university education, whereas institutions are coming more into focus in university education. This is probably due to the very strong professional emphasis of the programmes in the non-university field.

The most preferred method is still the traditional evaluation that is used in combination with different foci regularly or occasionally in 49 cases. And in contrast to earlier the tendency is that one agency very often uses evaluation on different levels, or in other words combines evaluation as a method with different foci. Nevertheless accreditation as a method comes close with 31 cases of regular or occasional use. Accreditation is most used in the associated countries and in the Dutch and German-speaking countries. There do, however seem to be very big variations in the procedures of accreditation, and the method could be a theme for further investigations.

An exception from the general statement above is 'institutional audit'. Whereas audit is hardly used on subject and programme level, or in combination with 'theme' as a focus, the combination of audit and institution is the third most popular type of evaluation used. It is primarily used in the English-speaking countries.

Finally the results of the survey show that several agencies experiment with benchmarking - often combined or integrated with other methods, but as an independent method it has not really gained force.

2.3 The four-stage model

The variety in evaluation types used also causes a differentiation in the methodological elements used compared to 1998. For instance, there are examples of accreditation procedures, where self-evaluation does not take place, where external experts are not used, and where reports are not published. In general, however, the four stages mentioned in the pilot projects and reflected in the Council Recommendation are still common features in European quality assurance.

All agencies use external experts. In most cases these are experts representing the field, and very often international experts are included in the expert panel, the latter may often be from neighbouring countries or countries sharing the same language. In a few cases students are included in the expert panel. In general the expert panels seem more multifaceted in the EU/EFTA-countries than in the associated countries.

The experts are typically appointed by the quality assurance agency, but in 1/3 of all cases higher education institutions have taken part in the nomination of the experts. The experts have varying functions and responsibilities. Their core function, however, seems to be site visits, and in half the cases they also write the reports without the assistance of the agency. In another third of all cases they draft the reports in co-operation with agency staff. The agency seems more involved in carrying

⁷ The term 'type of evaluation' comprises a combination of the focus of an evaluation and the method used.

out the different functions of an evaluation process in the EU/EFTA-countries than in the associated countries.

Self-evaluation is included in 94% of the evaluations, but only in 68% of the accreditation processes. Management and teaching staff are usually part of the self-evaluation group, whereas graduates rarely participate. The participation of administrative staff and students vary considerably, and for the latter there seems to be a connection to the method used: Students are usually represented in connection with evaluations, but rarely in connection with accreditation. As documentary evidence, the self-evaluations are in almost all cases supplied with statistical data, and in about half the cases also with some kind of supplementary surveys.

With the exception of two cases site visits are part of all evaluation processes in Europe. The average length of the site visits is two days, but site visits in connection with audits typically last longer. The results of the survey demonstrate a mutual agreement on the elements constituting site visits: Almost every participating agency works with interviews, tours of the facilities, with final meetings with the management, and the examination of documentary evidence. The most controversial element of the site visits seems to be classroom observations, which are used in 25% of the cases.

Reports are published in almost all cases of evaluation, but sometimes omitted in connection with accreditation. The reports typically contain conclusions and recommendations, and very often they also contain analysis, while empirical documentation is only included in 1/3 of all cases. It is common praxis to consult the evaluated institutions before the reports are published, whereas other agents are rarely consulted. In 3/4 of all cases the evaluated institutions are also responsible for follow-up of the recommendations, while the quality assurance agency and the government are responsible in a little less than half of the cases. But all respondents agree that follow-up takes place in one way or another.

2.4 Criteria and standards

In addition to the four characteristics mentioned above the results of the survey demonstrate that a fifth characteristic is emerging as a common feature, namely the use of criteria and standards.

Whereas in 1998, the terms of reference of the evaluation procedures were typically legal regulations, and the stated goals of the evaluated institutions, today almost all agencies apply some kind of criteria. This, of course, is true for accreditation procedures, where threshold criteria or minimum standards are used in order to pass judgment, but in other evaluation procedures as well, for instance when 'good practice' criteria are used. In several countries, however, the criteria used are not explicitly formulated.

The questionnaires and the attached material from the European quality assurance agencies point to the need for a number of features to be investigated further when discussing the use of criteria and standards: What is the difference between criteria and standards? When does an agency work with threshold criteria, and when does it work with best practice criteria? Is it important whether the criteria are explicitly formulated or not? Who formulates the criteria? And to what extent do agencies work with a pre-formulated set of criteria suitable for every evaluation process?

There is no doubt that standards and criteria are suitable tools in connection with transparency - nationally and internationally, but the issue is of course the extent to which they promote the continuous quality improvement at the institutions.

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4. TYPES OF EVALUATION IN EUROPEAN QUALITY ASSURANCE

In the 1998 Status Report on the state of quality assurance in member states, it was already clear that there was a diversity of methods used in quality assurance at the national level in Europe. In the 1998 study covering 18 countries, five main evaluation types are identified: Subject evaluation, programme evaluation, institutional evaluation, audit and accreditation.

An overall aim of this project is therefore to investigate the current status of the types of evaluation used in European quality assurance - after Prague and before Berlin in the year 2003. In other words, to produce a broad review of the types of evaluation, and to describe the methodological

developments in European quality assurance, in order to stimulate further the mutual exchange of information on quality and quality assurance at Community level. Furthermore, to examine, whether there is still consensus on what constitutes good practice in European quality procedures, in the form of common elements, as identified in the 1998 Commission study and stated in the Annex of the Council Recommendation.

Hence, this section starts out with an overview of the types of evaluation used provided by the present survey, and afterwards, in the subsections 4.2 - 4.5 the different types and methods are investigated a bit further.

4.1 The evaluation landscape

One of the major questions put to the agencies in the survey was therefore: ‘How often do you use the different types of evaluation?’ in order to get a picture of the entire range of various types of evaluation used by European quality assurance agencies. Type of evaluation is defined as a method: evaluation, accreditation, auditing and benchmarking combined with one of the following categories of focus: subject, programme, institution or theme. The combination of the element-based method and focus resulted in 16 different types of evaluation⁸, as shown in Figure 29.

Figure 2: Types of evaluations

	Eval- uation	Accredit- ation	Audit	Bench- marking
Subject	6	1	1	6
Programme	21	20	5	7
Institution	12	10	14	4
Theme	10	0	1	4

Quality assurance institutes were asked to tick the methods they use ‘regularly’, ‘occasionally’, ‘rarely’ or ‘not at the moment’.¹⁰ The figures in the above table show the number of agencies carrying out the listed types of evaluation regularly or occasionally.¹¹

The very small numbers in some of the boxes may indicate that some combinations of method and focus are of a very analytical kind. When looking solely at the combinations including ‘regular use’, the entire range of combinations used can be reduced further as ‘evaluation, accreditation, audit and benchmarking of a theme’ are used on a regular basis by less than two agencies. This also counts for institutional benchmarking, accreditation of a theme, and audit at subject level. Hence the results of the survey show that European quality assurance can be identified as resting on eight main types of evaluations that are used on a regular basis.

⁸ For definitions see Appendix B

⁹ The agencies were also given the opportunity to add further types under the category ‘Other’. An example of this category is ‘research evaluation’.

¹⁰ Appendix A shows, which types of evaluation various agencies do.

¹¹ In the question 12 of the questionnaire we asked how often any of the 16 different types of evaluation was used. The agencies were allowed to tick several methods, and to tick if a method was carried out regularly, occasionally, rarely or never. We thereby left the agency itself to decide on how to interpret the frequency, and does not make it depend on the number of evaluations carried out, as that may differ between small and large agencies. The category ‘never’ was later changed to ‘not at the moment’ as the agencies stated in the subsequent telephone interviews that this category seems too definitive to choose, as they may consider implementing the method in the future.

Figure 3: Frequency of the types of evaluation used on a regular basis¹⁹

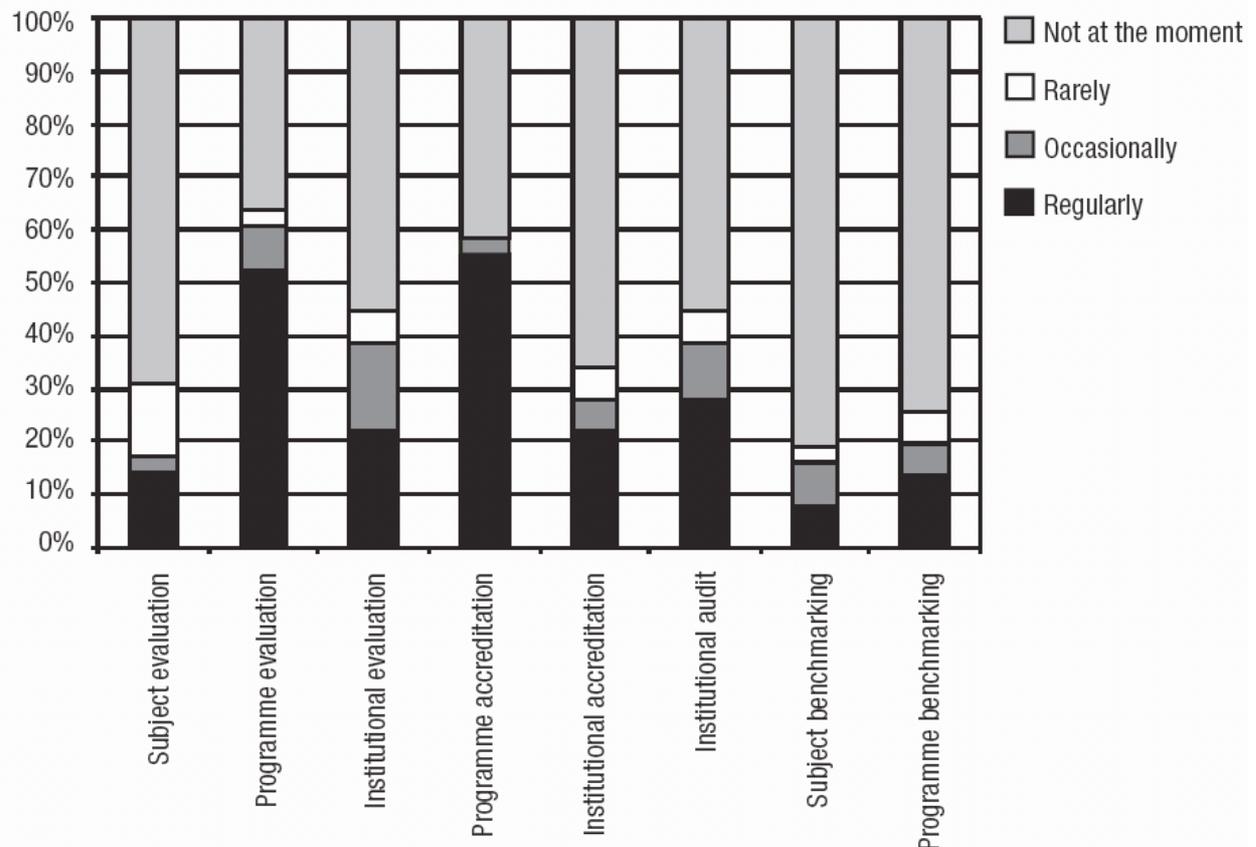


Figure 3 above illustrates that accreditation and evaluation of programmes are the two types of evaluation used most regularly in European quality assurance, followed, in order of diminishing frequency, by institutional audit, institutional accreditation, institutional evaluation, subject evaluation, programme benchmarking and subject benchmarking.

4.2 Evaluation

'Evaluation' is often used as a general term for the procedure of quality assurance. However, this survey defines 'evaluation' as a method parallel to other methods, such as audit etc. and uses the term 'evaluation Type' as an umbrella definition. 'Evaluation' in this context is therefore combined with different focal points, such as subject, programme, institutions, and theme, defined as a type of evaluation.

- *The evaluation of a subject*¹² focuses on the quality of one specific subject, typically in all the programmes in which this subject is taught.
- *The evaluation of a programme* focuses on the activities within a study programme, which in this context is defined as studies leading to a formal degree.
- *The evaluation of an institution* examines the quality of all activities within an institution, i.e. organisation, financial matters, management, facilities, teaching and research.
- *The evaluation of a theme* examines the quality or practice of a specific theme within education e.g. ICT or student counselling.

In the member states that participated in the pilot project, programme and institutional evaluations were the basic ways of evaluating higher education. These kinds of evaluations are still widely used. According to Figure 3 'evaluation of programme' is among the most frequently used evaluation types in European quality assurance as 53% of the agencies do this type of evaluation on a regular basis. Institutional evaluation is less widespread, as only 22% of the agencies are using it regularly.

¹² A subject is for example the subject 'chemistry' within the study programme of medicine.

Evaluation of programmes¹³ is a type of method mainly used by the Nordic, Dutch or English-speaking agencies. Comparing the use of the methods in the university and non-university sector, there is more focus on programmes than on institutions in the non-university sector. This is probably due to the very strong vocational or professional emphasis of the programmes in the non-university field. The non-university sector also has a tradition of private, professional accreditation of programmes, e.g. in engineering.

Evaluation of institutions examines the quality of all activities within an institution, i.e. organisation, financial matters, management, facilities, teaching and research. According to the European University Association and the French CNE, for example, 55% of the agencies are not using this method at present.

Subject evaluation focuses on the quality of a specific subject, typically in all the programmes in which this subject is taught. This type of evaluation is used regularly by 14% or occasionally by 3% of the agencies respectively.¹⁴ 14% of the respondents stated that they use rarely and 69% not at the moment this type of evaluation. However, due to the ambiguous nature of the term 'subject' there is some degree of error in these statistics.

In the 1998 Status Report it was concluded that in an historical perspective, the first national evaluation procedures had a single focus, whereas the agencies in the following cycles expanded their focus of evaluation activities. This development can also be observed in this study. In the evaluation of university education, the emphasis has moved from programme-oriented in the 1990s to a broader focus on the subject, programme, and institutional level. Several agencies now combined several focal points in their evaluations; for example, an agency that traditionally used to evaluate programmes may now also evaluate institutions.

4.3 Accreditation

Accreditation is another widely used method in European quality assurance. It is especially common in the associated countries, where this method has been a traditional way of assuring the quality of higher education. Moreover, countries such as Germany, Norway, and the Netherlands have since the completion of the survey decided that this should be the main type of quality assurance of higher education. This study shows that accreditation of programmes is used on a regular basis by 56% of the respondents.¹⁵ It is an evaluation type primarily used by the German-speaking agencies, by agencies in the associated countries, by the Dutch agencies, but also by Nordic and southern agencies. Accreditation of institutions is done on a regular basis by 22% of the agencies, e.g. by German, Austrian and some in the associated countries, although not used at present by 67%. Hence, the term accreditation is ambiguous. When looking at the accreditation process, accreditation is usually mixed with evaluation. As it is elaborated further in Chapter 5, evaluation and accreditation include the same methodological element, the so-called four-stage model. It is, however, important to note that accreditation is not the same as evaluation. In the above-mentioned 2001 ENQA report on *accreditation-like practices*, accreditation was defined as having the following characteristics:

- Accreditation recognizes (or not) that a higher education course, programme or institution meets a certain standard, which may be either a minimum standard, or a standard of excellence.
- Accreditation therefore always involves a benchmarking assessment.
- Accreditation findings are based on quality criteria, never on political considerations.
- Accreditation findings include a binary element, being always either yes or no.

Furthermore, the 2001 Report states that whereas accreditation always refers to a standard, evaluations may or may not do so, or do so only to some extent. In the survey, a difference is made between the accrediting process that precedes the launching of a new programme (*ex ante*), and the accreditation control applied to established ones. The accreditation procedures in associated countries

¹³ In this context the distinction between 'programme' and 'subject' was ambiguous. In the survey we defined 'programme' as 'studies leading to a degree' whereas 'subject' would be 'an element of the programme' e.g. the subject chemistry within the programme of medicine. However, the terminology 'subject' seems to be too narrow in the meaning of 'part of a programme'. In countries such as Sweden and Germany the entire field/subject is under scrutiny as one particular programme within a field is only a small part of many options.

¹⁴ Three % is equal to one case.

¹⁵ N=36 cases, 19 out of 36 doing it on a regular basis, 3 (8%) occasionally, 1 (3%) rarely and 13 (36%) not at the moment.

involved both an accreditation of existing programmes and of pending or planned programmes. Therefore some of the associated countries make a clear distinction between *ex-ante* and *ex-post* accreditation. The accreditation process is seen as a dual process, whereby one body of the agency evaluates and makes an assessment according to pre-defined standards, and another body (e.g. accreditation commission) takes the final decision whether to approve the programme or not. Many agencies in the associated countries also accredit institutions, when an institution must be approved before it can establish or offer new programmes.

In Germany, newly introduced programmes are accredited. The practice is introduced as a means to control the quality of new degrees, allowing the institutions flexibility in creating new programmes. The existing national framework was considered to be an obstacle to development of new and innovative programmes. The Germans make a clear distinction between the functions of evaluation and accreditation, as they serve different purposes.

Accreditation can be directed at other levels than programme and institution - also agencies themselves can be the objects of the accreditation procedure. One of the main tasks of the German Akkreditierungsrat is to accredit other agencies. However, they are also allowed to undertake accreditation of programmes at the request of the Länder. Another similar development can be observed in other parts of Europe. Very recently, a National Accreditation Organisation (NAO) has been established in the Netherlands. Its mandate is to verify and validate external assessments performed by QA agencies.

4.4 Audit

An audit can be defined as a method for evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the quality assurance mechanisms, adopted by an institution for its own use in order to continuously monitor and improve the activities and services of a subject, a programme, the whole institution, or a theme. As the ENQA report *Institutional Evaluations in Europe* of 2001 emphasises, the fundamental issue in quality auditing is how does an institution know that the standards and objectives it has set for itself are being met?

The present study shows that the most common type of audit is 'institutional audit', with a 28% regular usage ratio. Audit also comes third among the methods used on a regular basis in European quality assurance. Institutional audit is used regularly by all the Irish and British agencies, for example, and some of the agencies in Nordic and associated countries. 11% of the agencies use institutional auditing occasionally, while 56% does not use it. Auditing of programmes, subjects and themes is not very common in European quality assurance.

4.5 Benchmarking

In the same way as the term 'accreditation', benchmarking may be discussed as a method or an element of evaluation. In the present study, benchmarking is defined as a method, whereby a comparison of results between subjects, programmes, institutions or themes leads to an exchange of experiences of best practice.

The 'best practice' element common to most definitions of benchmarking implies that whereas accreditation procedures are typically based on minimum standards or threshold criteria, benchmarking procedures are typically based on excellence criteria.¹⁶ It is, however, possible to do benchmarking without any explicit criteria at all. It should be noted that the term 'benchmark' may cause some confusion, as the 'subject benchmarks' employed, for instance, by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in the UK are a set of criteria used as a frame of reference in connection with any evaluation procedure, which does not necessarily include any comparative element.

This study shows that several agencies do experiment with benchmarking in some way or another, but it is probably too early to conclude anything about common procedures.

The results are that the most common form of benchmarking is 'programme benchmarking' which in 14% of the cases are used on a regular a basis, whereas in 75% of the cases it is not used at all as a method. Subject benchmarking is employed by the responding agencies regularly or occasionally by 9%, while it is not applied in 80%of the cases. Benchmarking of institutions and of themes are rare.

¹⁶ See section 6, Criteria.

Furthermore, it should be noted that none of the agencies carried out benchmarking as their primary activity, and only one agency, the Netherlands Association of Universities of Professional Education, mentioned benchmarking (of programmes) as their second most used type of evaluation

4.6 Variety of evaluation types in European quality assurance

One of the major conclusions of this study must be that at a national level the European quality assurance agencies use a variety of evaluation types. Where the 1998 study showed that evaluation agencies were sticking to the evaluation type (combination of method and focus) that they had traditionally used, the picture today is very different.

Not only do agencies seem to have extended their focus of evaluations. Agencies also tend to combine different types of evaluation, such as institutional auditing, with programme evaluation. The diagram in Appendix A shows that the majority of the agencies used normally more than one method on a regular basis. The agencies also tend to be committed to one or two methods, which are then used systematically throughout an area of higher education.

However, on the basis of the questionnaire responses it is not possible to deduce, when a certain evaluation type is used. This is definitely an interesting question to examine more closely, but it calls for a qualitative in-depth study of the evaluation history in various countries.

It has often been discussed in the ENQA context that many of the European quality assurance agencies have been through a 'playing or testing' phase and that many of them are now changing their evaluation regimes by going into the second establishment phase. This hypothesis is difficult to confirm on the basis of the questionnaire. However, in the qualitative responses to the questionnaire, concerning the future strategies of the agencies, it became clear that some of the agencies are at a turning point in their history. This is the case in the Netherlands and Norway, for example, where the governments have decided on new evaluation strategies that have had organisational consequences for the agencies. The UK is a further example of this, as a new evaluation regime is being implemented. Other countries, including Denmark, are preparing and implementing new evaluation strategies.

Parallel to this development among older quality assurance agencies there is a similar trend in other parts of Europe where new quality assurance structures and agencies are established. This is especially true in the German-speaking part of Europe, with more regional quality assurance agencies being established in Germany, and a Swiss agency having recently been established.

4.7 Summary

The survey shows that European quality assurance can be identified as based on eight main types of evaluation. The survey also demonstrates that most agencies carried out several types of evaluation. It is shown that the principal types¹⁷ of evaluation used in European Quality Assurance are 'accreditation of programmes' and 'evaluation of programmes'. The majority of the participating agencies use both on a regular basis.

In general programmes are the most chosen focus of the evaluation activities. This is especially characteristic for the field of non-university education, whereas institutions are coming more into focus in university education. This is probably due to the very strong professional emphasis of the programmes in the non-university field.

The most chosen method is still the traditional evaluation that is used in combination with different foci regularly or occasionally in 49 cases. And in contrast to earlier the tendency is that one agency very often uses evaluation on different levels, or in other words combines evaluation as a method with different foci.¹⁸ Nevertheless, accreditation as a method comes close with 31 cases of regular or occasional use. Accreditation is most used in the associated countries and in the Dutch and German-speaking countries. There does, however, seem to be very big variations in the procedures of accreditation, and the method could be a theme for further investigations.

¹⁷ The term 'type of evaluation' comprises a combination of the focus of an evaluation and the method used.

¹⁸ Hence the number of 49 that refers to evaluations is only interesting compared to other numbers from the same figure, as each agency may have ticked 'evaluation' up to four times in combination with different foci.

'Institutional audit' forms an exception. Audit is hardly ever used on subject and programme level, or in combination with 'theme' as a focus. On the other hand, the combination of audit and institution is the third most popular type of evaluation used and it is applied primarily in the English-speaking countries.

Finally the survey shows that several agencies experiment with benchmarking - often combined or integrated with other methods, but as an independent method it has not really come through yet.

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