



## **STATEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN NETWORK OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION (ENQA) TO THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN MINISTERS OF EDUCATION IN BERLIN 18-19 SEPTEMBER 2003**

### **Summary**

#### **Introduction**

The European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) is the umbrella organisation for European quality assurance agencies in the field of higher education. The Steering Group of ENQA, in consultation with its member organisations, has prepared this statement for the Ministers who are meeting in Berlin.

The main points of the statement are:

- ENQA has fulfilled the call of the Prague Communiqué by undertaking a range of important activities including an extensive survey of quality assurance agencies and their procedures in European higher education, a major transnational European evaluation project (TEEP), and closer cooperation with the ENIC/NARIC networks
- ENQA has strengthened its organisation and is reforming its organisational structure and practices into a more dynamic form that fits better its expected role in the European process
- ENQA expects to change formally from a network into an association
- ENQA will open membership to all the signatory countries of the Bologna process
- ENQA will, in cooperation with the relevant stakeholders, develop a European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies, covering public, private and professional agencies, operating in Europe and on a wider international scale
- ENQA's criteria for membership have been strengthened to ensure that membership of ENQA is available only to trustworthy and reliable quality assurance agencies.
- ENQA has launched a major process towards the endorsement in 2004 of a Code of Principles for ENQA agency members. The Code will focus on the internal quality mechanisms of agencies.

#### **Important activities following up on Prague**

ENQA, supported by the European Commission through the SOCRATES programme, has initiated several major initiatives and projects in response to the Ministers' call in Prague 2001 for collaboration in establishing a common framework of reference for quality assurance, and which work directly towards the establishment of the European quality assurance framework by 2010.

1. ENQA has published a comprehensive survey of *Quality Procedures in European Higher Education*. The survey covers higher education quality assurance practices in all the ENQA member countries and provides authoritative information on the scope and

level of common and shared processes and methods applied in the various countries and agencies.

2. ENQA has been the coordinator of the major pilot project "*Trans-National European Evaluation Project*" (TEEP), supported by the European Commission. TEEP has investigated the operational implications of a European trans-national quality evaluation in three disciplines (Physics, History, Veterinary Science) in order to test a method for transnational external evaluation. The evidence from this project shows that the implementation of first-cycle degree programmes varies considerably across the programmes and that a considerable amount of work remains to be done in terms of the development of an internal quality culture inside higher education institutions.
3. ENQA has taken the important initiative in convening a series of meetings with the European University Association (EUA), the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB) and the European Association of Institutions of Higher Education (EURASHE) to discuss points of mutual interest and developments in the European process.
4. ENQA has accepted and continues to accept into membership quality assurance agencies from EU Associated countries. Accordingly the ENQA General Assembly of 22-23 May 2001 accepted all the EU Associated countries as full members of ENQA.
5. ENQA is giving a high priority, as urged by the Minister in Prague, to closer cooperation between recognition and quality assurance networks. Therefore ENQA, together with the ENIC/NARIC networks, has initiated a joint agenda to improve the criteria on decision-making with regard to recognition of qualifications.

### **Strengthening the organisation, structure and functions of ENQA**

ENQA has support from its members to participate actively in the European process, both as a mutually supportive body that provides professional services, and as a wider advisory body in methodological questions, with a mandate to issue recommendations.

At ENQA's General Assembly in September 2003, a reform process will be launched leading to the presentation at the 2004 General Assembly of reforms for the transformation of the network to an association, a restructured organisation, strengthened membership criteria and a code of principles.

Within its constitution, which includes criteria for membership of the Network, ENQA has already established definitions of good quality for European quality assurance agencies and the professionalism and credibility of the procedures and methods that they apply. But ENQA considers it a high priority to proceed now to give special emphasis to the internal quality assurance practices of its member agencies. Accordingly ENQA has set up a working group of its members with the mandate to draft a strong code of principles for internal quality assurance of agencies, including as an important element the obligatory external evaluations of these.

In practice this will mean that present and future ENQA members will 'take their own medicine' and subject themselves to external quality assurance and evaluation.

### **Future role of ENQA in the European quality assurance framework**

ENQA recognises that the quality of external quality assurance must be credible, transparent and comparable. This should be a requirement not only for ENQA members, but also for all evaluation organisations operating in European higher education. ENQA intends, therefore, as a high priority, to proceed to examine the shared and common elements of processes and methodologies among quality assurance organisations. In doing this, ENQA is prepared to use the Network as a means of recognising higher education quality assurance agencies in Europe, in connection with the formation of the European Higher Education Area and quality assurance framework.

Accordingly, ENQA will begin work, together with relevant stakeholders, on a European Register for Quality Assurance Agencies, covering public, private and professional agencies, operating in Europe and on a wider international scale. ENQA's capability in this respect is related to

its framework as a growing association-like network, the membership of which will be opened to all the signatory countries of the Bologna process; it is also related to the good working relationship that it has established with ESIB, EUA, and EURASHE.

This initiative and others can play a major role in the coming European quality process after Berlin. ENQA looks forward to being a constructive participant in this process. Its contribution will be built on the solid foundation of the results and initiatives presented in this statement.

## **THE ENQA STATEMENT**

The European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) was officially established on 29 March 2000, in Brussels. The European Commission convened the meeting which was attended by 50 representatives of European quality assurance organisations in the field of higher education, in addition to public authorities with responsibilities for higher education in their respective countries. The network was created to promote European-wide cooperation in the field of quality assurance between the different actors involved.

The idea for ENQA originated from the so-called European Pilot Project of 1994-1995, which demonstrated the value of sharing and developing experience in higher education quality assurance. The idea was given momentum by the Council Recommendation of 24 September 1998 (98/561/EC) on European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education. As defined in the Recommendation, the broad objectives of this cooperation were to be as follows:

- Encouraging and developing the exchange of information and experience, in particular on methodological developments and examples of good practice,
- Fulfilling the requests for expertise and advice from the authorities concerned in the Member States,
- Supporting higher education institutions, which wish to cooperate in the field of quality assurance on a transnational basis,
- Promoting contacts with international experts.

These recommended objectives led to the establishment of ENQA, which offers an opportunity to extend the experience of European states in the field of higher education quality assurance beyond their own borders and allows all the actors to share and help develop ideas and practices. ENQA is supported by the European Commission through the SOCRATES programme. According to the regulations of ENQA (approved by the Network General Assembly), this cooperation is pursued by developing links between quality assurance and other existing European Community activities, particularly in the framework of the SOCRATES and LEONARDO DA VINCI programmes and by examining opportunities for joint efforts in the field of recognition of qualifications for professional purposes.

In the Prague Communiqué of 19 May 2001, the Ministers of Education called upon the universities and other higher education institutions, national agencies and 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 good practice. In connection with the Berlin Conference of September 2003, ENQA is pleased to report that this call has been and is being answered.

### **ENQA activities in response to the Ministers' call in Prague 2001**

1. ENQA has initiated several projects specifically aimed at increasing cooperation in terms of a common evaluation framework and that have relied on the participation of non-ENQA member organisations, thus engaging as wide a group of participants as possible.
2. In 2002 ENQA accepted the first five quality assurance agencies from EU Associated countries as its members, as the Prague Communiqué indirectly invited ENQA to do.
3. In February 2002 the so-called Berlin Preparatory Group invited ENQA to present and discuss its views on European higher education quality assurance, and ENQA was pleased to recognise that the expectations of the Preparatory Group were in accordance with initiatives ENQA had been planning. One of the key questions in determining the future models of a European quality assurance framework is the question of identifying

possible shared protocols among European quality assurance agencies, cf. the results of the ENQA survey presented under item 4.

4. ENQA has prepared and published a survey of quality assurance practices in 34 European quality assurance agencies. The focus of the survey is on the evaluation models that are being used. The overall conclusion is that there is a major development towards convergence in the basic methods and procedures even if national agency priorities do also still vary in many respects. Other main results of the survey are:
  - Since 1998, European quality assurance has extended in scope (e.g. universities, non-university sector), especially in the fields of accreditation and benchmarking, and new European agencies have been established,
  - European quality assurance can be identified as based on eight main types of evaluation, the most common of which are: accreditation of programmes, evaluation of programmes, and institutional audit. The majority of the participating agencies use some or all of these on a regular basis.
  - The survey shows that the extra-university sector compared with the university sector places more importance on programmes than on institutions. This is probably due to the very strong professional or vocational emphasis of the programmes in the extra-university field.
  - Self-evaluation is included in 94% of the evaluations, but only in 68 % of the accreditation processes.
  - All agencies use external experts.
  - Finally, the use of defined criteria and standards are now much more widespread compared with the situation in the late 1990s.

The first stage of the survey will be followed by a second stage which will concentrate on the state of the art of evaluation procedures based on a number of identified themes and aspects of the evaluation methodologies and procedures identified in the first stage. ENQA will collaborate with one of its member organisations, the Comité National d'Évaluation (CNE) of France, to develop this concept further in terms of a detailed understanding of European practices.

5. ENQA has also been the organiser of the major project "Trans-National European Evaluation Project (TEEP 2002), supported by the European Commission within the framework of the SOCRATES programme. This is a pilot project with the objective of investigating the operational implications of a European transnational quality evaluation of study programmes in three disciplines, History, Physics, and Veterinary Science. The focus of this pilot is to develop, in accordance with the recommendation of the Prague Communiqué, a European methodology for quality evaluators, building on previous professional experience using common criteria as the basis of an evaluation process. Through this project, ENQA is also providing the participating programmes (in 14 European higher education institutions from 11 countries) with a process and results that will help them to support a continuous improvement of their quality in teaching and learning. On the basis of the results obtained so far, it is clear that there are differences in the stages of the degrees of knowledge and awareness of subject-specific and generic competences both across programmes and across disciplines. In addition, there are differences regarding the extent to which the programmes have formulated and used the TUNING descriptors or have not used them. The evaluated programmes recognise, however, that quality assurance strategies are necessary for the future and intend to build on the TEEP experience. But TEEP has also proved that there is still a lot to do in terms of the development of a quality culture inside institutions.

6. The Prague Communiqué also invited ENQA to collaborate with other bodies to achieve increased European quality assurance cooperation. In 2001 ENQA invited the leadership of the European University Association (EUA) and the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB) to participate in talks where mutual interests and cooperation could be discussed in practical terms. Since the first invitation, positive and constructive discussions in joint meetings have continued to this date. The organisations have worked to identify issues that the organisations can agree upon in their contribution for Berlin. During the process, ENQA also invited the European Association of Institutions of Higher Education (EURASHE) to participate in these discussions.
7. Students will be principal beneficiaries of the increased European cooperation in higher education quality assurance if this process is linked to degree recognition. ENQA has taken up close contacts with the European Network of Information Centres (ENIC) and the National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARICS) in order to improve linkage between the recognition of degrees and the quality assurance of corresponding programmes. The three networks have agreed to contribute to the Berlin process by launching shared themes of cooperation that include the following objectives:
  - Improved recognition of joint degrees by means of a better understanding of the external quality assurance applied to the corresponding programmes
  - ENQA's sharing of information with the ENIC/NARICs about European quality assurance systems in order to improve the criteria used to make decisions on the recognition of qualifications
  - Development of a typology of degrees to promote comparability and recognition in practical terms
  - A decision of the three networks to investigate how to evaluate a truly transnational education in a credible way through identifying possible good practices in this respect.
  - After the Berlin ministerial conference the ENQA, ENIC and NARIC networks may also address the issue of non-recognised and non-formal education in their cooperation.

### **Position of ENQA on the development of the European Higher Education Area**

Throughout the existence of the Network, the Steering Group of ENQA, elected for a three-year term by the member organisations and governments represented at the annual Network General Assembly, has taken into consideration the wishes of the Network members with regard to its activities. The 2002 General Assembly ended with a positive encouragement for ENQA to increase its involvement and visibility in the development of the European quality assurance framework. In the light of this encouragement by the General Assembly, ENQA intends to meet these expectations from its members and to participate in the formulation of the European dimension, always bearing in mind that ENQA is a network of independent opinions among its members.

The application procedures used by ENQA when accepting European quality assurance agencies into its membership allow membership of the Network to be seen as a reliable indicator of an agency's soundness and trustworthiness in higher education quality assurance. The Steering Group of ENQA has adapted a special procedure, also approved by the General Assembly, to deal with new membership applications by ensuring a neutral and impartial treatment of the applications. The decisions are based on the following criteria:

- The agency undertakes external quality assessments (at institutional or discipline level) on a regular basis. These quality assessments may involve evaluation, review, audit, assessment or accreditation and they should be part of the core functions of the agency,
- The agency should be involved in external quality assurance in at least one subject / field,

- The agency must be independent of individual higher education institutions. An organisation or entity inside a higher education institution is not considered an external quality assurance agency by the Network,
- The agency has been recognised as a national or regional quality assurance agency by the competent public authorities,
- The agency must have been operating for a minimum of two years to be adopted as a full member. Until that time the agency may be granted a candidate status,
- The agency or organisation must not be constituted as a profit-making concern,
- The agency must be adequately independent from government,
- The agency has established its own internal quality assurance mechanisms,
- The agency can provide documentation for the quality of its evaluations.

By introducing this criteria-based mechanism, ENQA has laid the groundwork for a possible later use of Network membership as a means of recognising higher education quality assurance agencies in Europe in connection with the formation of the European Higher Education Area and quality assurance framework. ENQA is capable of contributing to this process because its member organisations have mandated ENQA to work toward this goal. This mandate reflects the agreement in the Network that ENQA must stand out as a credible, professional organisation.

Accordingly, ENQA will develop a European Register for Quality Assurance Agencies, using its own membership criteria, appropriately adapted, which would be open on a voluntary basis to public, private and professional agencies, operating on a European or wider international scale. Inclusion of an agency on the Register would carry membership of ENQA with it, if so desired. This would mean in practical terms that present and future ENQA members would be subject to quality assurance and evaluation themselves.

In January 2003, ENQA sent a letter to all its member organisations asking for their views regarding the future role of ENQA in the European quality assurance framework. The background for this initiative was a discussion at the General Assembly in Copenhagen on 27 and 28 May 2002 on the possible future direction of the Network. Two different strategies were discussed briefly on that occasion, representing different approaches.

Under the first strategy, it was argued, ENQA could continue with the role it was established to undertake in 2000. This can be briefly summarised as a mutually supportive voluntary membership body of independent European quality assurance agencies, heterogeneous in nature, providing professional services to its members. These services include the exchange of professional information and expertise, the organisation of conferences, training seminars and workshops, and the sponsorship and publication of thematic research. In the past three years these activities have formed the basis for ENQA's annual action plans.

The second strategy would take as its starting point developments resulting from the Bologna Process and the subsequent Prague Communiqué. These suggest that there could be a more active policy-based role for ENQA. Indeed there appears in those documents to be a presumption that ENQA is already both willing and able to assume that role. If ENQA were to develop in that direction it would involve heading a movement towards a common European approach to quality assurance in higher education, with the appropriate authority and organisational structures, and would require ENQA to turn itself into the leading European policy development and advisory body in this area.

Feedback received from members indicated that they expected ENQA to participate actively, both as a mutually supportive body that provides professional services and as a wider advisory body in methodological questions, with a mandate to issue recommendations. This strategic discussion will continue at the next ENQA General Assembly in September 2003.

**Concluding remarks.**

ENQA's activities are focused on achieving its goal of effective European cooperation in quality assurance within the perspective of the Bologna process. The results as presented in this Statement represent a considerable achievement, bearing in mind both the limited resources and funding available to the Network, and the continuing high level of autonomy of national higher education and quality assurance systems. This autonomy is also reflected in the many recent national initiatives, and new developments on a national basis, in the organisation of external quality assurance. Accordingly, ENQA considers it a high priority to proceed with investigating the shared and common elements of processes and methodologies and the constraints on further convergence among quality assurance agencies.