

A speech held by Bruno Curvale, the President of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), in the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve ministerial meeting on 28 April 2009.

Ministers, Commissioner, distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

May I first begin by thanking the Bologna Follow-Up Group for being given the occasion to speak on behalf of ENQA – the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education - today. I would also like to express the honour of our association to participate as a consultative member in the Bologna Follow-Up Group.

I am not going to repeat what is already set out in the ENQA position paper that you can find in your portfolios. It presents a vision of Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and points out the challenges that ENQA foresees in the near future. I would like to think that this position paper would be seen as a part of the stocktaking.

I just would like to underline the following five points:

1) Firstly, I would like to emphasise how interested the agencies are in the European dimension. ENQA numbers today 47 agencies plus 26 affiliate organisations. Regional and thematic networks of agencies have developed mutual understanding. Agencies based on other than nationally specified grounds, i.e. professional or transnational agencies, are asking to join the ongoing European debate on quality assurance, which ENQA makes possible through its seminars and workshops. This demonstrates a real and deep commitment of the European quality assurance (QA) agencies to develop, on the basis of common values, a shared understanding of what, beyond national specificities, QA in higher education means.



2) My second point is about the success of the European Standards and Guidelines for the Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). They are part of the ENQA membership criteria. All national QA agencies have made, or are in the course of making, the necessary arrangements in order to fulfil the ESG requirements; newly created agencies start with the purpose of becoming ENQA members and a notable number of agencies have already applied to the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR). These facts clearly show that European QA agencies recognise the ESG as one of the pillars of their professionalism. They also demonstrate that QA agencies, beyond their national missions, are ready to further the European dimension, which the Bologna process also asks for.

3) My third point is about the challenges of independence. I would like here to emphasise that the independence of QA agencies, as promoted in the ESG, should not only be seen as a challenge for the agencies themselves but should also be considered as a challenge by the other co-builders of the European Higher Education Area. The challenge is crucial and its impact can be significant - recognition of the results of QA mechanisms can only be achieved when the evaluator is recognised as being free from external influence.

4) My fourth point is about the information delivered about higher education. For ENQA it is of the utmost importance for the development of trust, that all activities related to the production of information about higher education, from programme assessment and quality audit to benchmarking or rankings, have explicit goals and methodologies.

Of course, specialists and well-informed decision-makers will always find the information they need. But students, both prospective and current, their families, employers and stakeholders of every kind, must also find the appropriate information they need to develop their own personal level of confidence in the capacity of higher education to deliver sound educational programmes and degrees. Helping everybody to understand the meaning of all this publicly available information should be seen as a challenge - not only by quality assurance agencies, but also by other actors.



5) I would like to conclude this short speech by pointing out the importance of the E4 dialogue (ENQA, EURASHE, EUA, and ESU). This dialogue is a must. Let me give you two examples.

Accountability is the true counterpart of autonomy of higher education institutions. However, it is still a challenge in many places. Progress is still needed, as are collaborative approaches between higher education institutions and agencies. ENQA will be present to promote the necessary link between internal and external quality assurance.

Accountability is a challenge for institutions; and the role of students with regard to the responsibilities they are asked to take in the functioning of institutions and with regard to the role they should play in Quality Assurance is also a challenge for institutions. Again, ENQA will be present to develop a fruitful dialogue with students.

Because of this necessary dialogue, ENQA is particularly glad to see in the Communiqué that the E4 is asked to carry on and notably to ensure that the European Quality Assurance Register is externally evaluated. The evaluation of EQAR will be an important step in the building of the appropriate QA approaches needed in the European Higher Education Area.

Thank you for your attention.

