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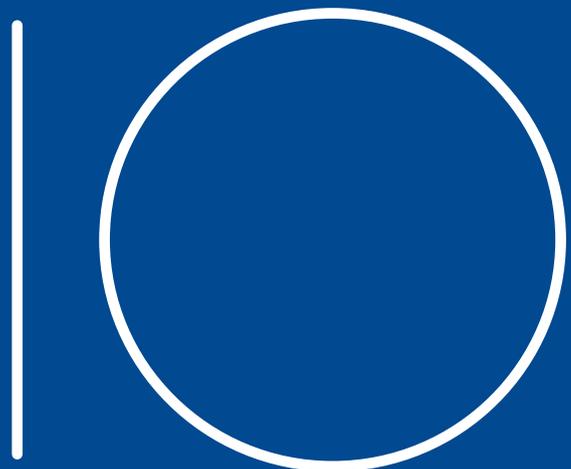
# *ENQA: 10 years (2000–2010)*

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*A decade of European co-operation in  
quality assurance in higher education*

10<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY PUBLICATION

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Helsinki, Finland 2010

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ACHIM HOPBACH,  
*President*  
*European Association*  
*for Quality Assurance*  
*in Higher Education*  
*(ENQA)*

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## Foreword

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The history of ENQA arises in the late 1990's when the first formal procedures for quality assurance began to stabilise on a national level. As a result of the European Pilot Projects in the field of external quality assurance during the nineties, participants felt the need for further exchange of information and experience in a relatively new field in order to provide an opportunity for mutual learning. From these first steps, ENQA has developed from a discussion forum of few quality assurance enthusiasts into a network of a slowly but steadily growing number of agencies in Europe, and from a network into an elaborated association with a wide membership across Bologna signatory countries in Europe with a firm political role.

For this Anniversary publication, on behalf of the ENQA Board, I am very pleased to present addresses

from four persons who engaged themselves during the past years, and thus made the most significant contribution to the development of ENQA. The authors of this publication, Dorte Kristoffersen who was already a member of the steering group of the European Pilot Projects, and the first three Chairmen and Presidents Christian Thune, Peter Williams and Bruno Curvale, bring their individual views to the history and present position of ENQA. Hopefully, these anecdotes give the reader an interesting journey to some major steps in the development of external quality assurance in Europe during the past decade. I would like to thank the authors for contributing to this publication, which is published to celebrate the accomplishments in the quality assurance of European higher education from the early 1990's until 2010.



DORTE  
KRISTOFFERSEN

## 10 ENQA: 10 YEARS THE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF ENQA

# *From the first pilot projects to the founding of ENQA (1994–2000)*

### **Introduction**

At the beginning of the 1990s, the quality assurance landscape in higher education in Europe looked very different from that of today. There were newly established external quality assurance agencies in a handful of countries, i.e. Denmark, France, the Netherlands and the UK. Other countries were contemplating the establishment of agencies, such as Sweden and Spain, and others were conducting pilot projects as a preparation for a future agency, for example Finland and Norway.

The introduction of formal procedures for quality assurance at the national level was driven by the general development of higher education in Europe. Traditionally, elite systems of higher education were rapidly undergoing a development towards mass systems of higher education, and in parallel, the need arose to ensure that quality was still upheld under the changed circumstances. Another reason for the interest in quality assurance was the desire of the European member states to increase student mobility through the Erasmus exchange programmes. If study abroad was to be recognised as equivalent to study in the home country, governments wanted assurance that the courses studied in other countries were of an equivalent and appropriate quality.

The European Commission was also interested in the discussions about the future of quality assurance, as it saw benefit in introducing a European dimension to quality assurance at an early stage as a means to help promote and achieve the European mobility objectives. The Commission's interest led to the establishment of a small expert group comprising representatives of ministries of higher education and of the agencies that existed at the time. This situation led to the initiative to conduct a number of pilot projects in quality assurance, the European Pilot Projects.

### **European Pilot Projects**

The decision to conduct the European Pilot Projects in the field of quality assurance was formally taken by the European Council of Ministers under the Dutch presidency in 1991. The starting point for the Pilot Projects was a survey initiated by the European Commission, Directorate General XXII: Education, Training and Youth (the Commission) of the quality assurance mechanisms already in place in the member states. The survey proved that only a few of the member states had introduced formal external quality assurance arrangements. The Commission was therefore invited to consider the possibility of organising a number of pilot projects in quality assurance. On the advice of the expert group, the

Commission proposed to review the teaching and learning in selected disciplines using a common approach to the evaluations. The Education Committee of the Council approved the proposal in 1994.

According to the European Report (1995), which reported the final outcomes of the pilot projects, their purposes were to:

1. Enhance awareness of the need for evaluation in higher education in Europe;
2. Enrich existing national evaluation procedures;
3. Further the transfer of experience; and
4. Impart a European dimension to evaluation.

The projects, which were funded by the Commission, were conducted under the enthusiastic leadership of Ms. Angeliki (Kiki) Verli-Wallace from DGXXII. In addition, a number of advisory and operational committees were established to help the Commission carry the responsibility for the projects and to ensure an appropriate European dimension in the project implementation.

An advisory group comprising two members from each participating state assisted the Commission in making decisions on the organisation of the project and in formulating follow-up plans for the projects. A management group was established to assist the Commission in the practical management of the projects, including the preparation of the evaluation approach. The group consisted of the four countries with established quality assurance agencies (see introduction) and a representative from Germany, Portugal and Norway respectively<sup>1</sup>. The management group delegated the operational responsibility for the projects to a Secretariat<sup>2</sup> shared between the Danish Centre for Evaluation of Higher Education and the French Comité National d'Évaluation.

In each member state, National Committees were set up to assume the responsibility for the projects at the national level, such as selecting those higher education institutions which would participate, and reflecting and reporting on the outcomes of the projects. Last, but not least, a European Committee was established comprising the chairpersons and secretaries of the national committees. The European Committee held the important responsibility for reporting on the final outcomes of the European projects. The projects included 17 countries, i.e. the 15 member states at the time, and Norway and Iceland, and a total of 46 institutions.

The organisation of the project to a large extent represents a first example of cooperation in quality assurance among the relevant stakeholders at the European level.

The project approach rested on the principles that were common to the four countries with established quality assurance systems at the time. The principles were:

- Autonomy and independence both from government and from higher education institutions in terms of procedures and methods concerning quality evaluation;
- Self assessment
- External assessment by a peer review group and site visits
- Publication of an evaluation report.

These principles later came to constitute the backbone of the European Council Recommendation of 24 September 1998 on European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education. Furthermore, I am sure that readers and users of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*<sup>3</sup> would agree that these basic principles are still being followed today, and they permeate the philosophy underpinning the ESG.

The principles were presented in operational *Guidelines for Participating Institutions* (the Guidelines<sup>3</sup>). There were other aspects related to the operationalisation of the common evaluation approach that were subject to more discussion in the planning of the projects than the principles above. Some of these aspects include classroom observation, inclusion of a peer from another country on the peer panels, and use of the members of the management group to conduct the training of the peers to be involved in the project.

These discussions about the finer details of the Guidelines led to the conclusion that each participating state could adapt the evaluation approach to the local context. In other words, at an early stage of the development of the external quality assurance approach, it became apparent that there are contextual factors related to national education systems, not least their legislation, that will have an impact on the organisation of the approach to quality assurance. This is a conclusion that most stakeholders in higher education still agree on today.

The projects were concluded at a conference held in December 1995 in the Canary Islands during the Spanish Presidency. In these exotic surroundings, the participants, i.e. institutions, national authorities and national experts, strongly and unanimously expressed the view that the main benefit of the projects was the exchange of information, and therefore recommended building on the momentum by creating a network

1 The members of the management group were: Jim Donaldson, SHEFC, UK, Karl O. Jordell, SLS Oslo University, Norway, Dorte Kristoffersen, The Centre for Evaluation of HE, Denmark, Marie-Odile Ottenwaelter, Comité National d'Évaluation, France, Klaus Schnitzer, Hochschul Informations System, Germany, Antonio Simoes Lopes, Universidade Tecnica de Lisboa, Portugal, Andre Staropoli, Comite National d'Évaluation, France, Christian Thune, The Centre for Evaluation of HE, Denmark and Ton Vroeijsenstijn, VSNU, the Netherlands.

2 Comite National d'Évaluation: Andre Staropoli, Marie-Odile Ottenwaelter, Andree Sursock & Nisa Balourd. The Evaluation Centre for HE: Christian Thune, Dorte Kristoffersen, Stina Vrang Elias.

3 *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2009, Helsinki, 3rd edition: [http://www.enqa.eu/pubs\\_esg.lasso](http://www.enqa.eu/pubs_esg.lasso)

that would allow continuous exchange of information and transfer of experience and methodological developments. The concluding section of the *European Report* (p. 40) lists the following mechanisms through which it was anticipated that these goals could be achieved:

- “An exchange of professionals in the evaluation field who would be invited to spend a length of time in another country’s evaluation
- A reciprocal use of European experts that would be facilitated by the development of national databases that would include areas of expertise and language skills
- An exchange of information at the European level which could include databases of national evaluations, catalogues of European evaluation programmes, the organisation of conferences and seminars, a newsletter or bulletin.
- The Network could also initiate experimental projects at the European level.”

The outcomes of the pilot projects were the first but decisive steps towards the establishment of a network for quality assurance at the European level not only in terms of the expression of the need for a network but also in terms of the future activities of the network.

### Next steps

After the finalisation of the pilot projects, initiatives were taken at several levels and involving various stakeholders to ensure that the projects were duly followed-up. The quality assurance agencies in place in Europe at the time came together on numerous occasions after the pilot projects to discuss their involvement in the implementation of the network, and through these initiatives confirmed their commitment to the idea. The European Commission worked in cooperation with the advisory group of experts to discuss and formulate a possible organisational structure and operational objectives for the network. These discussions led to the decision to work towards the establishment of a formal network in quality assurance, and that an application to seek financial support from the European Commission should be prepared. That such an application was likely to succeed was backed by the support from the educational committee of the European Commission and the preparation by the Commission of the Recommendation of 24 September 1998 on European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education.

ENQA became a reality in 2000. What happened between 1998 and 2000? The main reason why the pace of developments slowed down was the discussion of membership. The first proposal for the organisational structure suggested that the network was about quality assurance and thus for quality assurance agencies. Due to the emerging structures

of agencies, the ministries of education were involved in quality assurance activities at a practical level in a number of European countries. Therefore, this proposal was met with opposition among some governments. Furthermore, there was a discussion among the potential quality assurance agencies about how to deal with the federal states in Europe, such as Germany and Spain, and the fact that the number of members could for that reason extend far beyond the number of European member states. It was seen as a potential risk that the network would grow to an extent where cooperation and exchange could be hampered because of size. The involvement of ministries of education in the Network had the biggest impact on the developments. Due to the disagreement among governments on this point, the decision had to be taken to the European Council. However, the problems were resolved and it was decided to include both ministries of education and all national quality assurance bodies, i.e. including those operating at state or regional level as members of the European Network for Quality Assurance: ENQA.

The strengths of ENQA were very much the support from all parties and the agreement, backed by a clear vision formulated through the pilot projects, of the need for closer cooperation as a means of sharing experiences and practices.

### Concluding remarks

However, even before ENQA was formally established, other events, such as the Sorbonne (1998) and Bologna (1999) Declarations, would soon have an impact on the direction of the young network. The introduction of the European Higher Education Area was to have a considerable influence on the role of quality assurance in Europe. ENQA as a network, in its own right and through its members, was therefore soon to have an extended role beyond that of a loose network responsible for the sharing of information and experience among its members, which were the generators of its establishment.

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**ENQA meeting with U.S. Regional Accreditation Commissions, Copenhagen, 2005**



Photo: Christian Thune archives

**ENQA workshop After the Bergen Ministerial meeting - results and stocktaking on subsidiarity and convergence, Paris, 2005**



Photo: Christian Thune archives





CHRISTIAN THUNE,  
*Chairman of the Network  
 from 2000 to 2004 and  
 President of the Association  
 from 2004 to 2005*



## ENQA 2000–2005: From the launch of a professional network to the success in Bologna of a new association

### The launch of ENQA

On 28–29 March 2000, representatives of quality assurance agencies in the EU/EEA, of ministries responsible for higher education in the EU and EFTA/EEA-countries, and of associations of higher education met in Brussels for the launch conference of ENQA. The conference appointed a steering group to ensure the day-to-day management of the network and to follow up the decisions of the conference. This group elected me as Chair for the following three years. Eventually, I stayed at the helm of ENQA for more than five years, with a responsibility for the intense process that brought the network from relatively modest beginnings to a large association with a major political role in Europe. The present ENQA Board has asked me to present the key developments during my tenure as ENQA President and within a few pages. This has not proved an easy task considering the wealth of exciting details from these years. So the following pages cannot do any justice to the complexities of the ENQA process or to the many major contributions of those who worked at my side. On the other hand, I can also treat lightly, or rather not at all, the various opposing forces to a stronger ENQA.

As described in the previous chapter, the launch conference was the result of a process initiated by

the Council Recommendation of 24 September 1998 (98/561/EC) on European Cooperation in Quality Assurance in Higher Education. This Recommendation invited Member States to “*promote co-operation between the authorities responsible for quality assessment or quality assurance in higher education and promote networking*”. Moreover, the Commission “*encouraged the co-operation between the authorities responsible for quality assessment and quality assurance in higher education, also involving organisations and associations of higher education institutions with a European remit and the necessary experience in quality assessment and quality assurance*”.

As an initial follow-up of the Council Recommendation, the Commission invited EU quality assurance stakeholders to Brussels for a First General Meeting on Quality Assurance on 15 February 1999. It was decided at this meeting to set up a Quality Assurance working group. The important challenges of setting up the future European agency network and drafting proposals for the organisation, regulations and main objectives fell to this group of which I was a member. The group was asked to report back to the plenary meeting in September 1999. Then, hopefully, a launch conference of the new network could take place in the spring of 2000.

Kiki Verli chaired the meetings on behalf of the Commission in her usual energetic and forceful manner. Group members soon began to term the meetings “Kiki’s classroom”. The group initially shared a concern that the proposed network would become too dependent on the Commission and would primarily function as its policy instrument. However, the group demonstrated great and independent commitment to the cause. Accordingly, on 10 September 2001, a second General Meeting was presented with a number of working group documents. A very elaborate structural model for the network was proposed. According to this model, a *core network* would consist of representatives of authorities responsible for quality assurance in the 15 member states and the 3 EEA countries (i.e. agencies and ministries) and of representatives of the three rectors’ organisations; all in all, some forty persons would meet about two times a year. A larger group would be composed of more representatives of countries with multiple agencies, as well as the associated countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Finally, an *outer circle* would involve professional associations, thematic networks, associations, networks of universities, social partners, and student associations.

The ambition reflected in this proposal to create a very broad and inclusive network led to a very lively discussion. The Chair, Kiki Verli, had to conclude that the General Meeting preferred a simpler structure with two types of members: fee-paying members (quality assurance agencies and the three rectors’/ directors’ organisations) and non fee-paying members (ministries). The Conference accepted the offer from the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) to host the Secretariat.

The first ENQA General Assembly could then take place on 28–29 March 2000. The sixty participants, with a majority of ministerial representatives, agreed on the documents presented by the working group, including the broad objectives of the network that more or less quoted the Council Recommendation. The General Assembly also approved the central theme of encouraging and developing the exchange of information and experience, in particular on

methodological developments and examples of good practice – all undertaken with due independence.

Concerning funding, it was confirmed that regular ENQA activities should be funded by identical membership fees from agencies (but not from governmental representatives), while the funding of specific activities should be funded through grant applications, in particular through the EU Socrates programme.

Many good wishes were expressed at the launch conference. It is important to stress at this point that, during the following years, ENQA activities were to a large extent directed at fulfilling exactly its initial objectives with regard to the Council Resolution through newsletters, website, a long sequence of training workshops and conferences, and the sponsorship and publication of thematic research. These were and should essentially remain the bread and butter of ENQA activities. However, in this account these activities must give priority to ENQA’s road into prominence in European quality assurance politics – a road not exactly foreseen by its agency founders.

### **ENQA in the accelerating Bologna process**

Already from the second half of 2000, there was increasing activity among the key players in the Bologna process, not least in relation to the Commission’s initiated ideas on establishing some kind of overall European accreditation framework. The predecessor to the European University Association, the Association of European Universities (CRE), took responsibility for a major report on accreditation, which was discussed at conferences in Lisbon and Salamanca where the ENQA Steering Group participated actively. The Steering Group’s involvement in this process led to two important initiatives. Firstly, it drafted a position paper for the approaching Bologna ministerial meeting in Prague in May 2001. Basically, the paper presented ENQA’s willingness to take an active role in moving forward Bologna goals on quality assurance. It also pointed out that the European quality assurance dimension should be sufficiently comprehensive to provide students and employers with

real consumer protection, but at the same time warned about the risk of new bureaucratic and costly European constructions with insufficient added value. The paper then took a positive attitude in principle towards accreditation, in line with the CRE report, but was also very cautious about rushing a general European framework for accreditation.

The Steering Group's second initiative was to create a stronger link with the organisations of higher education and students. Accordingly, the leaders of both EUA and the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB) were invited to the ENQA General Assembly in Brussels, in May 2001, to share their views on European quality assurance. The GA decided to revise the regulations in order to include ESIB as a member along with EUA and EURASHE. A further development in the cooperation between EUA, ESIB and ENQA took place when the ENQA Steering Group invited these organisations' leaders to meet on 12 September 2001 in Copenhagen in order to discuss and agree on concrete next steps of cooperation. The meeting resulted in four shared projects as the basis for cooperation. From then on, this was the E4 Group.

### **Follow-up on Prague**

The Prague communiqué of 19 May 2001 provided a visible role for ENQA: *“Ministers called upon the universities and other higher education institutions, national agencies and the European Network for 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 (...)”*.

Not surprisingly, for the following two years, the work of the ENQA Steering Group increasingly focused on the follow-up of the Prague meeting and the preparations for the next Ministerial meeting in May 2003 in Berlin. During this process, it became more and more evident that there was, among the key players, a presumption that ENQA was already both willing and able to assume the role as the leading organisation in European quality assurance.

In January 2003, on behalf of the Steering Group, I therefore sent a letter to all member organisations asking for their views regarding the future role of ENQA in the European quality assurance framework. The challenge I presented was whether ENQA should continue to assume its initial role as agreed in 2000 – i.e. as a mutually supportive voluntary membership body of independent European quality assurance agencies, heterogeneous in nature, providing professional services to its members. Or, in addition, should ENQA take upon itself a wider role as a ‘political actor’? In that case, ENQA would have mandated authority from its members to function as a political actor in the higher education quality assurance landscape and to develop and recommend Europe-wide quality assurance policies and practices.

A sufficient majority of feedback from members indicated that they indeed expected ENQA to participate actively, both as a mutually supportive body providing professional services and as a political actor in the European process, with a mandate to issue recommendations. On this basis, the Steering Group could proceed on its political course, but of course always bearing in mind that ENQA was a network of independent opinions among its members.

The beginning of 2003 saw one more important event. In February 2003, ENQA convened a workshop in Sitges, with the theme: *Taking our own medicine – How to evaluate quality assurance agencies in order to create trust in their work and thereby in higher education*. The workshop was very stimulating and inspiring, and I drew the workshop to a close by presenting these conclusions: a quality assurance system for agencies should be developed based on defined criteria; agencies' internal quality assurance should include relevant stakeholders such as the evaluated institutions, students and external experts; last, but not least, quality assurance agencies should themselves undergo an independent, external evaluation at, for instance, five-year intervals. Thus, many months before the Bologna meeting in Berlin, ENQA was basically on course towards systematic quality assurance of the agencies themselves.

Among other ENQA activities following up the Prague communiqué, a comprehensive survey of *Quality Procedures in European Higher Education* was carried out by the Danish Evaluation Institute and funded by the Commission. The survey covered higher education quality assurance practices in all the ENQA member countries, and provided authoritative information on the scope of common and shared processes/methods applied by the agencies in their various countries. The results of the survey were especially relevant in the context of planning for the Berlin ministerial meeting. In February 2002, the Berlin Preparatory Group invited me to present and discuss its views on European higher education quality assurance. I was pleased to note that the Preparatory Group's expectations were in accordance with the initiatives ENQA had been planning, i.e. a key issue in determining the future models of a European quality assurance framework was the challenge of identifying possible, shared protocols among European quality assurance agencies.

ENQA was also the coordinator of the major pilot project "*Trans-National European Evaluation Project*" (TEEP), supported by the European Commission. TEEP investigated the operational implications of a European trans-national quality evaluation in three disciplines (Physics, History, and Veterinary Science) in order to test a method for transnational external evaluation. The evidence from this project showed that the implementation of first-cycle degree programmes varied considerably across the programmes and that a considerable amount of work remained to be done in terms of developing an internal quality culture within higher education institutions.

ENQA gave a high priority, as urged by the Ministers in Prague, to closer cooperation between recognition and quality assurance networks. Therefore, after a series of meetings, ENQA, together with the ENIC/NARIC networks, initiated a joint agenda to improve the criteria on decision-making with regard to recognition of qualifications.

Finally and importantly, ENQA continued to grant membership to quality assurance agencies from EU Associated countries.

### **Preparing for Berlin**

In 2003, the Steering Group introduced a major statement into the preparation process of the September Bologna ministerial meeting in Berlin. The statement stressed that, during the Steering Group's first three years, one important lesson learned was that ENQA needed a much stronger organisation and finances to fulfil European expectations. At ENQA's General Assembly in September 2003, a reform process would be launched, leading to the presentation at the 2004 General Assembly of reforms for the transformation of the network into an association, a restructured organisation, strengthened membership criteria and a code of principles.

The statement thus emphasised how the Steering Group had adopted a procedure, approved by the General Assembly, to deal with the many new membership applications. These applications should be based on criteria for high quality European quality assurance agencies, and the professionalism and credibility of the procedures they apply. By introducing this criteria-based mechanism, ENQA laid the groundwork for a possible later use of Network membership as a means of recognising higher education quality assurance agencies in Europe. Accordingly, ENQA had already committed itself at this early stage to develop a European Register for Quality Assurance Agencies, using its own, appropriately adapted membership criteria, and expecting present and future ENQA members to subject themselves to systematic external quality assurance and evaluation.

### **The challenge of the Berlin communiqué**

The Bologna Ministers' meeting on 18–19 September 2003 in Berlin recognised ENQA's readiness to take a lead in creating more transparency and comparability in European quality assurance processes. The Ministers called 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”.

The next Ministerial meeting was scheduled to take place in May 2005 in Bergen, and the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) asked ENQA to present its report by February 2005 at the latest. Thus, ENQA had only one and a half years to achieve this important, but also very sensitive task by implementing all three dimensions of the ministers’ call.

### **The ENQA reform process**

Parallel to the Berlin process, the Steering Group had to work intensively on the reform process towards reorganising ENQA as an association with new and sharper regulations, including membership criteria, and, not least, with substantially increased finances. In addition, higher membership fees would decrease ENQA’s dependence on EU funding. The results of the Steering Group’s efforts were presented in June 2004 at the General Assembly in Stockholm. The key points of the reform package were: the network should be turned into an association and have only quality assurance agencies as members. The provisions for membership should be strengthened according to the ongoing work on the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*<sup>1</sup>. In order to emphasise the independence of agency members, the membership of Ministries would no longer be relevant. The name of the Steering Group should be changed to “Board”; the Chair would become President supported by two Vice Presidents. ENQA finances should be strengthened by substantial increases in membership fees, so that, among other things, the Secretariat could increase its staff. EUA had had a seat on the Steering Group as an ENQA founding member, and ESIB had been member of the Steering Group since 2001. However, the creation of the E4 Group as a forum for cooperation eliminated this need for reserved seats for these two organisations on the Board.

The Stockholm General Assembly broadly supported the Steering Group’s proposal. However, there was a prolonged discussion about the formalities of closing down the “old” ENQA and establishing the new association. It was concluded that final approval of the new association should be deferred to an extraordinary General Assembly in November in Frankfurt. This later event proved successful to the extent that, by the end of the year, all member agencies had signed their approval to the regulations of the new association.

### **The road from Berlin to Bergen**

Representatives from ENQA member agencies were invited by the Steering Group to join two working groups in October 2003: Working Group 1 on standards for quality assurance agencies and an adequate peer review system, and Working Group 2 on an agreed set of standards for higher education institutions. I chaired Working Group 1, and Peter Williams chaired Working Group 2. Eleven agency member representatives served on the two working groups. At an early stage, I invited EUA, EURASHE, and ESIB to appoint members for the ENQA working groups. This invitation was based on the belief that, in this way, the necessary cooperation with these three organisations would have a very relevant background in a shared basic work process. However, the three other organisations preferred to set up their own background groups. As a result, the essential framework for cooperation became the E4 meetings. These meetings had their ups and downs, but were after all characterised by the serious commitments of the leadership of all four organisations towards reaching shared positions up to the meeting of Ministers in Bergen. Peter Williams and I also had an obligation to present the progress and preliminary results of the ENQA and E4 processes at BFUG meetings.

The other European networks (listed in order of seniority), the Nordic Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education, the Central and Eastern European Network, and the European Consortium of Accreditation, were in a sense all involved in the work process. Indeed, the selection of ENQA member

<sup>1</sup> *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2009, Helsinki, 3rd edition: [http://www.enqa.eu/pubs\\_esg.lasso](http://www.enqa.eu/pubs_esg.lasso)

representatives for the two working groups ensured that all three sub-networks were *de facto* represented. Moreover, on two occasions Peter Williams and I also had positive meetings with the leadership of the networks, including the leaders from the ENIC/NARIC networks, and were thus able to secure their support for the process.

Nevertheless, by early autumn 2004, I shared with my close ENQA colleagues some pessimism towards the possibility of meeting our February 2005 deadline. The turning point came when the ENQA extraordinary General Assembly in November supported fully the draft reports of the two ENQA working groups, including the framework for a European register. Constructive meetings followed within the ENQA Board, with the E4 Group and the Board of the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) in late November and early December 2004, and ENQA succeeded in achieving a joint understanding of the report structure, incorporating the two working group reports into one report, as decided in Frankfurt.

Between Christmas Morning and New Years Eve, Peter Williams and I did a substantial final drafting, and, to an extent, re-editing of what is now called the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education Area* (ESG). In early January 2005, the draft ENQA report could then be circulated for approval first to ENQA members and then to the E4. After further work in the ENQA Board, the E4 Group and a final circulation among ENQA members, the ENQA report could be considered as “agreed upon” by ENQA members and European partners. It was accordingly submitted to the BFUG on 21 February 2005. What was left, were two BFUG meetings where I succeeded, with the support of the EUA, EURASHE and ESIB, in convincing several ministerial sceptics that the proposed Register was not an unduly bureaucratic prospect.

### **Success in Bergen and farewell to ENQA**

The Bologna Ministers’ meeting in Bergen, on 19–20 May 2005, resolved to “adopt the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area as proposed by ENQA”. The Ministers

also asked ENQA to develop the practicalities of the implementation of the European register of quality assurance agencies, the principle of which they also welcomed, with other stakeholders. ENQA was further accepted as a new consultative member of the Bologna process, thus equalising its position with its E4 partners. This, then, then the happy ending to what was, beyond any doubt, the most intense work period of my professional life.

It had been my firm decision not to stand for re-election as ENQA President, even if, as I stated in the foreword to the ESG report, the Bergen result would be no more than a first step in what was likely to be a long and possibly arduous route. Soon after Bergen, it became obvious that the implementation of the European Register would be a difficult process. The ENQA General Assembly on 22–23 September 2005 in Madrid was my farewell to ENQA leadership. Many nice words were spoken on that occasion, but I, for one, knew that my efforts would not have been possible without the active and constructive support from my colleagues in the ENQA Presidency, the Board, the Secretariat and the ENQA members. It had been my privilege to work with so many inspiring and highly motivated colleagues.

I could then return to work full time as the head of the Danish Evaluation Institute with the comforting thought that ENQA would have a very experienced and committed President for the coming years. Indeed, Peter Williams had been persuaded to stand for election as my successor. Peter and I had been working closely together since 1999 and we both had learned the valuable lesson that the independence of both agencies and of their association is essential. The second important lesson we had learned is that the main cornerstone of all the ENQA activities must be to serve its member agencies, and work on European quality assurance issues on the basis of the secured mandates from its members.




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**European Quality Assurance Forum, Budapest, 2008**



Photo: EUA

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**Seminar on Quality Assurance and e-Learning, Sigtuna, 2009**



Photo: Per Westman, NAHE

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**4th General Assembly of EQAR, Madrid, 2010**



Photo: EQAR

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PETER WILLIAMS,  
President of ENQA  
from September 2005  
to September 2008

## IO A DECADE OF EUROPEAN QUALITY ASSURANCE COOPERATION

# From Bergen to the Register: A long and winding road

### Introduction

My period as President (September 2005 – September 2008) was dominated by the introduction of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*<sup>1</sup>, and the linked development of the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR). Both these initiatives were, in turn, strongly associated with the emergent agenda of the Bologna Process. But there were other important matters for the Board of ENQA to engage with, principally the criteria for membership and the way applications for membership would be dealt with.

### Adoption of the 2005 ENQA Report to ministers

The history of the Report to ministers containing the ESG has already been described by Christian Thune. I inherited the Report which had been adopted by the ministers at their May 2005 meeting in Bergen. But the ministers' adoption was not the end of the story: in the Bergen Communiqué, ENQA and its E4 partners were requested to do more. The ministers said '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.'

### Development of the Register

The Report to ministers contained not only the three-part 'standards and guidelines' structure which has now become the best-known part of the ESG, including the 'model for peer review of quality assurance agencies on a national basis' but also the proposal for a 'European register of quality assurance agencies based on national review'. The register proposal was closely linked to Part 3 of the ESG, but immediately gave rise to a long and protracted discussion among the E4 Group about the precise structure and function of such a register.

There were two points of view: I wanted to follow closely the proposals in the Report, which would have made the Register an inclusive (and voluntary) descriptive record, to which any agency could seek entry. Individual agencies would be allocated to

<sup>1</sup> *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2009, Helsinki, 3rd edition: [http://www.enqa.eu/pubs\\_esg.lasso](http://www.enqa.eu/pubs_esg.lasso)

various categories, depending on their characteristics. So, for example, there would be a category to cover agencies that had undergone independent peer reviews, another for non-European agencies and another for agencies operating in more than one country. The costs of running the register would be limited, since it would essentially be no more than a small published database, needing to be set up and then maintained, a job which ENQA willingly volunteered to undertake. The register was envisaged as no more, or less, than a useful source of reliable and objective information for anyone wanting to know more about quality assurance agencies operating in Europe.

The opposing opinion, held by the other three 'Es', was that inclusion in the register should be limited to those agencies that could demonstrate that they were compliant with the ESG through the 'peer review on a national basis' procedure. This vision of the register would turn it, in effect, into a European mechanism for the accreditation of agencies and, as a result, would need a much higher level of organisational formality, control and financial backing to establish its authority. The approach owed much to the EUA's earlier proposals for a regulatory framework for agencies, which had surfaced at a Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) meeting in Crete in 2003, discussion of which had excluded ENQA.

In the end, ENQA had to accept that an inclusive register was not viable, since there would be no way of keeping bogus accreditors off the list – in the absence of a veto mechanism, which would be hard to operate, any applicant agency would be able to demand inclusion. Although I had considerable misgivings about the principle of an accreditation body of the sort now to be created, I was not initially unduly worried by it (except insofar as it offered little except duplication of effort and outcome, and significant extra cost), since the criteria for inclusion in the register and for Full membership of ENQA were identical – compliance with the ESG evidenced through an independent peer review. In consequence, I believed that there would be no need for a separate and complex bureaucracy to be set up, as all Full members of ENQA would automatically qualify for inclusion on the register. Thus, the register could be managed by ENQA, with decisions through an associated, but autonomous, register committee. Only agencies that were not members of ENQA would require a separate mechanism, and there were unlikely to be many of those. ENQA and the register could operate as distinct entities, but joined by their common criteria and a shared administration. This 'confederal' approach would have another advantage – it would be very improbable that differences of interpretation about

compliance with one or other of the criteria would arise. Were such differences ever to occur, of course, then it would throw into doubt the operations of both organisations, and reduce the status and authority of the ESG themselves.

To emphasise the importance of maintaining the integrity of European quality assurance, I indicated that acceptance of a separate Register was conditional on agreement that Full members of ENQA, having already undergone a rigorous external evaluation to demonstrate compliance with the ESG, would automatically be included in the Register. This was, much to my regret, not acceptable to the other 'Es', but agreement was eventually reached that no agency should be required to submit to two reviews against identical criteria. Finally a compromise was reached whereby full membership of ENQA would be accepted by the register committee as 'prima facie' evidence of compliance with the Register's requirements, although the committee could not be bound to accept ENQA's decision automatically.

Once agreement had been struck on these basics, albeit reluctantly on my part, the subsequent creation of the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) began. This was an equally labyrinthine process, because the need to set up a new legal entity in Belgium, with appropriate governance, management and financial structures turned out to be very complex and time-consuming. Eventually, though, all was in place and EQAR was registered as an International organisation in Brussels and formally came into being in March 2008. I found myself in the ironic position of having to sign into existence, and welcome, an organisation whose value I was not convinced of and whose cost I considered wasteful. But I accepted that it was my duty, as the ENQA President, to do so.

### **ENQA and the Register**

Although EQAR has now been running for more than two years, at present it only includes 19 agencies on its list. ENQA has 44 Full members, of which 34 have so far undergone the independent review required for that status. The Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG), which acts as a kind of sponsoring organisation, is overseeing a review of EQAR, at the request of ministers at their meeting in Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve in 2009. It will be interesting to see how the Register's stakeholders view its achievements and value to date.

In my view, there are still two areas concerning EQAR that ENQA should particularly note: one is that it may be used to further agendas that are not necessarily in the best interests of European higher education. Agencies that choose not to be on the Register (or HE systems that are not subject to QA/accreditation by EQAR-registered agencies) may be

unfairly disadvantaged. Will the current voluntary status of inclusion on the Register eventually become the norm, then an expectation and finally a requirement?

Secondly, there may come a point where the Register is seen as more politically important than ENQA. Its relationship to the European Commission has always been close, not least because of the Commission's financial support and its evident desire to loosen the links between national agencies and national higher education systems, as demonstrated in its 2006 Recommendation on further European co-operation in quality assurance in higher education and agencies (and subsequent progress report). One result of a world where quality assurance became more about politics than education might be that financially-pressed agencies would choose to relinquish their ENQA membership in order to save themselves the annual subscription. Were this to happen, we would then quickly lose the benefits of a broadly-based association offering its members shared experience and technical know-how. Given that expertise in quality assurance is in generally short supply, it would be sad if a listing in the Register were to be preferred to access to the developmental opportunity of ENQA membership.

My fears that EQAR and ENQA could be moving towards wasteful and unproductive competition might need a radical shift in ENQA's structure and function if it is to be avoided. Instead of acting as a gatekeeper for agencies, ENQA could drop its rigorous membership criteria and leave the job of accreditation entirely to the Register. This would allow ENQA to return to its original function as a self-help professional association, undertaking project, seminar and training activities and free to offer criticism of European policy on quality assurance. It could thus relinquish its responsibility for the time-consuming review of agencies, which would be handed over to the Register.

### **Other activities**

While both the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG) and the Register were pivotal in establishing ENQA's position within the European higher education political landscape, they did not occupy all my time as President. Much of the work of the Board during those three years was focused on devising processes and procedures for scrutinising membership applications and review reports and for dealing with the aftermath when agencies were refused entry. Given the small number of Board members (nine) and the considerable workload involved, it was remarkable that a viable system could be created. It is a tribute to the commitment and dedication of the Board members

that a credible set of arrangements was not only put into place, but also operated successfully.

Of course, as we progressed, new challenges emerged. 'Compliance with the ESG' was an easy phrase to say or write, but the reality was much more complex. The ESG had not been written with compliance in mind – quite the opposite. How was a criterion to be interpreted in the context of particular national conditions? What did 'independent' really mean? Could we impose conditions on membership confirmation? These questions gave rise to many hours of argument and consideration.

All this was bureaucratic work; little time remained to move ENQA forward in the area of the development and improvement of quality assurance – its basic *raison d'être*, after all. It was one of my great regrets that I was not able to do more in that field of activity and there undoubtedly still remains much to be done (and always will!). But a lot was nonetheless achieved through the programmes of workshops and seminars that continued to be held, and I must acknowledge the contribution that the Secretariat in Helsinki made to the management of the organisation. Applications for grants, the logistics of conferences and meetings, and the management of membership applications, all were handled efficiently and well.

To summarise, my memories of being President of ENQA are dominated by early morning flights to Brussels, frustrations and friendships, and cultural manifestations of a sometimes unexpected nature in once-distant countries. But above all, I remember a project that was then, and remains now, important, worthwhile and centred on improving the experience of the students of Europe and the whole European higher education community. Viva ENQA!



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**Seminar on Internal Quality Assurance - Enhancing Quality Culture, London, 2010**



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Photo: Amanda Nelson, QAA



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**Seminar on Internal Quality Assurance - Enhancing Quality Culture, London, 2010**



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Photo: QAA



BRUNO CURVALE,  
President of ENQA  
from 2008 to 2009

## IO A DECADE OF EUROPEAN QUALITY ASSURANCE COOPERATION

# Toward the European quality assurance dimension: Fostering the participation of ENQA members

### Preamble

I warmly thank ENQA, the Presidency and the Board for giving me this opportunity to write about something which still means a lot to me, that is, my time as an ENQA Board member and, of course, my short time as President of the Association. I take this opportunity to thank also all the colleagues in the association and in the secretariat with whom I had the privilege to work during the years I worked with ENQA. I still value very much the objectives of ENQA and the inspiring atmosphere that comes from the cooperation between people devoted to better national and European higher education.

### Introduction

I see my time as President of ENQA as the beginning of a transition period between a first phase during which ENQA had to react mostly to situations like the 2003 ministerial mandate for the development of European standards for higher education, or the negotiations for a European register of quality assurance agencies, and a newer phase during which ENQA will have to develop its activities more independently. In 2009, the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* were being implemented and the European Quality Assurance

Register for Higher Education (EQAR) was in place. It was clear to me that after this second phase, the association would have to develop its own concepts and projects further. I also hoped that it would have been a transition between a period characterised by the rather inflexible relationship ENQA had with its E4 partners (ESU, EUA, EURASHE), and another period based on a more open relationship between the four actors, who would have clear respective responsibilities and deal firmly, in the spirit of collaboration, the natural tensions between them.

Before explaining how I see my Presidency and what I have tried to participate in, I need to look back briefly to the past and describe the events that contributed to shaping my thinking about ENQA. Then, I will address two topics that, except for the question of internal management, were the focus points of my last year as President of the ENQA Board.

### The years before my Presidency

As a Board member since 2003, I was well aware of some of the conflicts and tensions that had punctuated the history of the Network, and later, of the Association.

Thanks to the pilot projects financed by the European Commission and then the 1998 joint

Recommendation of the EU Council and EU Parliament, the emergence of an organisation devoted to the progress of quality assurance agencies was a new element in the landscape of higher education in Europe. That project was and still is ambitious: to build a credible and reliable European quality assurance dimension, in addition to national level requirements. This double allegiance – both national and European – of most of the member agencies of ENQA is a dimension that is far more present in ENQA than in the other E4 organisations. I mention this, because the question of how to develop an ENQA vision was one of my concerns. This double allegiance has to be taken into account when considering the goals and strategy of the association. That is why it is important to enhance the understanding of the agencies' national contexts when developing the ENQA policy.

On the one hand, there is the allegiance to national approaches and context, and on the other hand, there is the dedication to build a European dimension in quality assurance in higher education. This tension, internal to the Network, was, in my opinion, one of the elements that made it complicated for ENQA to find collective answers to the great challenges the European quality assurance agencies were facing from the very beginning. Three challenges had a great impact: the creation of the European Consortium for Accreditation, the writing of the ESG, and the negotiation about the establishment of EQAR. In each case, we have learnt a lot about the inherent difficulty of working together, particularly in an international context.

As a consequence of this history, I started my Presidency with the idea that it would be valuable to develop an internal dialogue for a greater coherence and understanding within the Association. A second line was to try to draw out all the consequences of the implementation of EQAR, and to develop ENQA's capacity to guarantee the quality and credibility of the external evaluations of the quality assurance agencies applying for ENQA membership or EQAR listing.

### **1. The development of ENQA's internal dialogue**

On becoming an Association in 2004, ENQA decided to go beyond the activities of the Network, which were mainly the exchange of experience, and to strengthen its participation to the building of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The idea was to develop the capacity of ENQA as such, to influence the course of events that were gradually shaping the European Higher Education Area. The objective was then to define goals and actions lines.

The empowerment of the E4 Group during these years also showed that it was important not to rely on an insufficient number of people with regard

to institutional relations. Involving more people in the cooperation between the E4 organisations was a further objective, and not only because of the workload which was undoubtedly rather heavy. In such matters, involving more people is necessary in order to limit the effects of individual misunderstandings and interpersonal conflicts. Supporting a broader involvement of the Board members was important to take forward the policy thinking.

How to develop this collective thinking and to base the Board members' action on well designed and supported action lines? I was convinced, like many others, through my participation in the writing of the ESG, and then in the negotiation that led to the establishment of EQAR, that it was important for the Board and Presidency to have more than one annual occasion to consult the members about the direction the Association should take. The General Assembly mainly focused on administrative and legal matters, and there was a concern that it may not fully play its role with regard to the elaboration of ENQA's policy.

The preparation of the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve ministerial meeting in 2009 was an opportunity seized by the Board to develop internal dialogue. The ENQA position paper was first drafted by the Board, and then circulated to all members and associates/affiliates for consultation. The document reflects well the diversity of concerns in the Association. The internal consultation also had a positive effect on clarifying the relationship between ENQA and ECA. The two different parts of the General Assembly, the Forum on current issues followed by the statutory responsibilities of the GA, were another response to the need to give the ENQA Board and Presidency a firm background to their activities. But is that enough?

### **2. ENQA, promoter of "quality" in quality assurance in higher education**

Quality assurance in higher education is not a simple question, as we all know. It is clear that there are a lot of expectations from numerous stakeholders having different interests. The goals assigned to quality assurance seem to be endless, and range from the steering of national higher education systems to serving as information sources for students, and, of course, as improving tools for Higher Education Institution management. Quality assurance in higher education has many definitions, as already stated in the ESG: *"Quality assurance' is a generic term in higher education which lends itself to many interpretations: it is not possible to use one definition to cover all circumstances"*. This question of assuring quality in higher education is not a minor one. Looking at all the difficult debates and misunderstandings that slow down the implementation of tools designed to improve

trust in higher education at national and international levels, it is obvious that an association of quality assurance agencies should assist in clarifying this domain of activities. Who else would be more relevant? On three occasions, we had to start thinking about the purposes and quality of activities falling within the province of quality assurance.

### **The implementation of the European Quality Assurance Register**

The negotiation about the Register led ENQA to adopt a rigorous approach to its membership requirements. In order to convince the E4 partners and all stakeholders that ENQA could maintain and manage the register, it was decided to make ENQA membership a clear sign of quality with regard to the fulfilment of the ESG. The strategy did not work. The Register now exists independently of ENQA, and time will tell what the added value of the Register is to the development of the European quality assurance dimension. More importantly, at the end of the negotiation, it was clear that only one external evaluation valid for both agencies' applications to ENQA and EQAR was necessary. Consequently, the question was then to make sure that the external evaluation of QA agencies was fair, robust and trustworthy. ENQA took up the challenge. The Board and the Secretariat worked hard to improve the guidelines for external reviews, to learn from experience and to develop appropriate training for experts.

### **The emergence of rankings**

Of course, rankings were not something new during years 2003–2009, but they were given more and more attention because of the Shanghai ranking. The already difficult debates about quality assurance in higher education got even more complicated. Will rankings replace internal and external quality assurance as an impulse for progress and better quality in higher education? Are they providing the clear and accurate information needed by stakeholders?

Interestingly, rankings can be counted amongst the range of existing quality assurance tools. They can be used heuristically and can be applied in well-mastered professional approaches. However, they have powerful side effects which can be problematic. The debates about rankings make it clear that, besides the competition issue, there is also a need for information about higher education which is not yet well covered by quality assurance. This is certainly a question for ENQA. The practitioners involved in quality assurance should participate in the debate about rankings.

Quality assurance in higher education is a difficult issue which constantly needs further explanation. What can be expected from it, and what does quality

mean in this field? My first speech as President of ENQA, at the end of the European Quality Assurance Forum in Budapest in 2009, was about this matter. For specialists, it is clear that there is no possible confusion between rankings and quality assurance even if there are some links. But this is not the case for most of the public and I still see good reasons for ENQA to develop a means of educating the public and communicating about quality in higher education.

### **In conclusion**

I have tried here to explain my main preoccupations as the President of ENQA. I will have certainly forgotten to mention some notable occurrences and there are, of course, important questions that have no place in such an exercise.

The fascinating – I do think they are fascinating – questions raised by quality assurance in higher education at national, European and international levels deserve the attention of practitioners who confront quality assurance activities in reality on a daily basis. Because of this, agencies, stakeholders and the European Higher Education Area need ENQA. Its partners need it because talking about quality assurance and doing quality assurance are two different things. Its members need ENQA because, through the exchange of experience and collaborative work, it gives opportunities for improvement. Finally, the European Higher Education Area needs ENQA, because it is a place where agencies can learn how to balance the tensions between national and European requirements.

As Board members, we had first to concentrate on many administrative, but important, matters, and particularly on the ENQA membership applications which were very time consuming. I remember very well, after a long meeting, the Board's dissatisfaction to see that some core questions remained unanswered due to lack of time. I wish we had more time. It is something in which I would have liked to see more changes.

Finally, I convey to the Presidency, the ENQA Board, the members and the Secretariat all my best wishes in order for the association to play fully its role in the building of a coherent and trustworthy European Higher Education Area during the next ten years.

ACHIM HOPBACH,  
 President  
 European Association  
 for Quality Assurance  
 in Higher Education  
 (ENQA)

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## Conclusions

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The decision of the European Council of Ministers to conduct the European Pilot Projects in the field of quality assurance in 1991 initiated from a survey by the European Commission stating that only a few of the member states had introduced formal external quality assurance arrangements. Authors of the survey therefore encouraged the Commission to organise a number of pilot projects in quality assurance. As a result, these pilot projects introduced the first, modest formulations of quality assurance principles which were translated into the Four-Stage-Model, providing a foundation for quality assurance in higher education, and establishing European cooperation in this area. During the development of these principles, active members of national authorities and experts among others saw a need to form a network for sharing of information and experience among its members. These were the first steps of ENQA which was founded as a network in 2000. The need for pan-European cooperation became even more prominent when the Bologna Process proceeded and put quality in the focus of the development of the European higher education area.

Since the founding of the association, the ministerial conferences of Prague (2001), Berlin (2003), Bergen (2005), London (2007), Leuven/

Louvain-la-Neuve (2009) and Budapest and Vienna (2010) can be characterised as major milestones determining the direction of ENQA's development until the current days. It became apparent that there is a demand for an actor in quality assurance that would systematically contribute to the formulation of European quality assurance procedures. In each ministerial conference, ENQA has been given a mandate to develop quality assurance by different means. In 2001, it was essential that ENQA would fully commit to the building of a European quality assurance framework by 2010. When looking back in time, it can be concluded that the framework has been successfully implemented, and that there now exists an acknowledged profession of quality assurance experts and an established group of national quality assurance agencies in most of the Bologna signatory countries following the same European procedures.

Without doubt, the 2003 Bologna ministerial conference in Berlin marked a significant milestone in the development of ENQA. ENQA, together with EUA, EURASHE and ESIB (now ESU) were mandated to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines for quality assurance, as well as to work towards an adequate peer review system for quality assurance agencies. Today, they are commonly named

the E4 group. In the ministerial conference of 2005, ENQA, together with its E4 partners, presented the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*. The main purpose of these standards and guidelines was to guarantee professionally conducted quality assurance procedures on a high quality level. Thanks to the application of the ESG in quality assurance systems and processes in the 46 countries of the Bologna Process, quality assurance in the EHEA, while respecting the principle of subsidiarity, is based on a common ground of shared values and principles, and is conducted in the specific European way of professionally sound processes with the participation of all stakeholders. The peer review system, which originates from an ENQA workshop in Sitges, near Barcelona, in 2003, has developed into a systematic, cyclical review process of agencies which guarantees professionalism and high level performance of European quality assurance agencies. In the 2005 conference, ENQA was also accepted as a consultative member in the Bologna Follow-up Group, thus strengthening ENQA's role in the political decision-making process in Europe. The growing importance in the political decision-making process required a more formal structure of the network in order to organise internal decision making, and to be able to perform its role as a voice of European quality assurance agencies in the political arena. As a consequence, ENQA was transformed into an independent association in 2004.

As the authors mention in their articles, the founding of EQAR became a sort of a divide in ENQA's development. There were concerns about founding such a register. However, a mandate to found the register was given to the E4 group in 2005, and it began to operate in Brussels, Belgium, in 2007. Today, ENQA and EQAR function in a consensual and constructive manner, sharing similar standards for membership in ENQA and inclusion in EQAR. It is worth mentioning that a review report carried out for ENQA membership purposes serves as *bona fide* evidence for an agency to be listed in EQAR. The cooperation in this aspect, as well as in all other levels, has worked efficiently between the two organisations. Sharing similar criteria, and thus being able to use the same evidence material, has saved resources of agencies and reviewers in arranging and carrying out reviews. It remains to be seen whether these two organisations will differentiate more clearly in the minds of the members of both organisations.

ENQA's contribution to the ministerial conferences of 2009 was in a form of a position paper reconfirming the main principles for quality assurance, emphasising, for instance, that the responsibility of quality assurance lies within institutions and that further

implementation of the ESG remains as one of ENQA's main tasks.

In 2010, ENQA published a statement on the European Commission's Report on *Progress in Quality Assurance*, pointing to the major achievements that were made in applying the ESG in different national settings which forms a true European dimension of quality assurance. Therefore, ENQA does not promote the creation of a unified, pan-European quality assurance regime. However, while respecting the principles of diversity and subsidiarity, it does promote the compatibility and comparability of quality assurance processes that are based on common principles.

In the ministerial conference of 2010, ENQA presented an ENQA report for the Anniversary Bologna ministerial meeting, emphasising areas of quality assurance still to be tackled.

The contributions of the authors give a deep insight into the development of quality assurance in Europe and a wider European higher education area, in both methodological and institutional terms. It becomes clear that when those quality enthusiasts met in the late nineties, this was only the beginning of a long and ongoing journey.

From 2010 and onwards, the major challenge, in my view, is to strengthen the political role of ENQA. It must be ENQA's aim to be a main political actor with material influence on decision-making processes at the European level, and to deliver the core values of quality assurance as enunciated in the ESG. Thus, ENQA aims to be recognised as the core source of expertise and information in the field of quality assurance at the European level.

The second main aim is to develop quality assurance processes as core instruments for both enhancement and accountability purposes.

Thirdly, in order to reach these aims, ENQA needs to comprise quality assurance agencies from all countries in the EHEA to be as inclusive as possible, and also needs the active involvement of all members. I hope to see ENQA to evolve as an active membership organisation providing knowledge, sharing of best practises and views among its members and partners. I would like to see ENQA evolve into a peer support community for European quality assurance professionals. In reaching these aims, ENQA as the voice of European quality assurance agencies will substantially contribute to the implementation of our vision of a European higher education system that is committed to a culture of quality.





ENQA

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FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE  
IN HIGHER EDUCATION