



ENQA Report to the Bologna Ministerial
Anniversary Conference of March 2010



Introduction

In advance of the ministers responsible for higher education in the European Higher Education Area conference in Vienna and Budapest to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Bologna process, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) wishes to acknowledge the progress that has been made in the past ten years in developing internal and external quality assurance procedures and national quality assurance systems. Since the ministers stated in Berlin in 2003 that “the quality of higher education has proven to be at the heart of the setting up of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA)”, they have adopted the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) in Bergen in 2005 and at their conference in Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve in 2009 endorsed the establishment of the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR).

ENQA is convinced that the ambitious goals, that Europe has set itself within the framework of the Bologna process, can only be achieved by means of sustained international co-operation.

In submitting this report, ENQA wishes to use the 10th anniversary of its own founding to

highlight its contribution to quality assurance in the EHEA and beyond but also to indicate its willingness to respond to the many challenges still present on the 10th anniversary of the Bologna process.

The European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (based in Helsinki) was established in 2000 to promote European co-operation in the field of quality assurance. The idea for the association originates from the European Pilot Project for Evaluating Quality in Higher Education (1994-95) which demonstrated the value of sharing and developing experience in the area of quality assurance. Subsequently, the idea was given momentum by the 1998 Recommendation of the European Council on European co-operation in quality assurance in higher education and by the Bologna Declaration of 1999. The European Commission has, through grant support, partly financed the activities of ENQA since the very beginning. In November 2004, the General Assembly transformed the Network into the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

Major Outcomes of the Quality Assurance action line of the Bologna Process

Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2005)

The ESG outline standards and guidelines for:

- Internal quality assurance within higher education institutions
- External quality assurance of higher education
- External quality assurance agencies

The ENQA report introducing the ESG emphasised that the EHEA is characterised by its diversity of political systems, higher education systems, socio-cultural and educational traditions, languages, aspirations and expectations. This makes a single monolithic approach to quality, standards and quality assurance in higher education inappropriate. The report set its face against a narrow, prescriptive and highly formulated approach to standards. In both the standards and the guidelines, the report prefers the generic principle to the specific requirement. On the one

hand, the ESG are designed to be applicable to all quality assurance agencies in Europe, irrespective of their structure, function and size, and the national system in which they operate. On the other hand, the legal and cultural aspects of the national higher education system cannot be ignored when considering the compliance with the ESG. There is little point in adopting a “hard line” position in respect of compliance with the ESG if, by doing so, trustworthy and credible agencies are prevented from gaining Full membership of ENQA through no fault of their own. Thus, the practical handling of the ESG should reflect the inherent tensions between European Standards and national tradition, context and legislation.

The European Quality Assurance Forum (2006)

As agreed in the 2005 Bergen Communiqué, a consultative forum was jointly organised by the E4 Group: the European representative bodies of

quality assurance agencies, students, universities and other higher education institutions. The forum met for the first time in Munich in November 2006 and provided an opportunity to discuss European developments in quality assurance. The European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF) has continued to meet annually and has proven very popular with staff from higher education institutions, students and staff from external quality assurance agencies. EQAF has been held since in Rome (2007), Budapest (2008) and Copenhagen (2009). The 2010 forum will be held in Lyon.

The European Quality Assurance Register (2008)

As envisaged in the Berlin Communiqué, the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) was established in March

2008. Based in Brussels, EQAR was founded as an international non-profit association under Belgian law by the E4 Group to increase the transparency of quality assurance in higher education across Europe. EQAR publishes and manages a register of quality assurance agencies that substantially comply with the ESG and aims to provide the public with clear and reliable information on quality assurance agencies operating in Europe.

By the end of 2009, the membership of EQAR consisted of the four founding members, two social partner members (Business Europe and Education International) and 26 governmental members that have decided to support the operation of EQAR and get involved in its overall governance.

As of October 2009, there were 17 agencies from nine of the Bologna signatory countries listed on the Register.

Achievements OF ENQA

Membership

At the end of 2009, ENQA consisted of:

- 48 members (44 full members and 4 candidate members) representing 25 Bologna signatory countries
- 26 associates (representing 19 European countries, 3 trans-European and 2 non-European countries) and
- 3 European or regional affiliates

In all, 33 of the 46 Bologna signatory countries have national or regional agencies participating in ENQA at full, candidate, affiliate or associate levels.

Since 2005, in order to become full members of ENQA (and since 2008, to be eligible to be granted admission onto the EQAR), quality assurance agencies are required to successfully undergo an external review and thereby to show that they comply sufficiently with the ESG. Already, by the end of 2009, 32 members (representing 17 signatory countries) have successfully undergone this external review process against ESG.

External reviews of ENQA member agencies are normally initiated and coordinated by national bodies. National authorities may also commission a body from another country to carry out the review of the QA agency. Where this is not possible or where an agency so requests, however, the reviews may be organised by ENQA. Of the 32 reviews completed by the end of 2009, 25 were commissioned at the national level and seven have been co-ordinated by ENQA. The reviewers composing the panels for ENQA co-ordinated

reviews have undergone training at a series of workshops organised by ENQA, the first of which was held in May 2009.

Reviews are underway in respect of many of the remaining agencies who hold full or candidate membership. Under the adoption of its new membership criteria in 2005, all full members of ENQA who have not undergone review by September 2010 will revert to candidate membership.

Activities and outputs

Since its foundation, ENQA has organised many workshops and seminars hosted by national Quality assurance agencies throughout Europe. These have included a number of projects which have been mainly financed by the European Commission. ENQA disseminates its activities through the publication of its Workshop papers and through its Occasional Papers series (15 of which have been published to date).

ENQA plays an important role in disseminating good quality assurance processes at institutional level by promoting the assessment of internal quality assurance systems in higher education institutions.

ENQA maintains a dialogue with the leadership of the regional accreditation organisations in the United States and the Asia-Pacific region and has also initiated and coordinated transnational quality assurance projects in North Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Challenges for the future

In its position paper to the ministers in advance of the 2009 Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve conference, ENQA highlighted the principles and priorities that will guide its work in the coming years as agreed upon by its members.

In particular, these principles assert that the primary responsibility for quality rest with higher education institutions, that internal quality assurance is a duty of the higher education institutions and a clear link can be seen between the development of an effective quality culture inside institutions and the degree of operational autonomy they enjoy. Furthermore, ENQA asserts that the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area form the overarching framework of quality assurance in the EHEA and that the relationship of higher education institutions, quality assurance agencies and governments should be based on a clear distribution of roles and responsibilities respecting institutional autonomy and the independence of quality assurance agencies.

ENQA will continue to support the development of quality assurance processes that reflect the close link between enhancement and accountability and aims to foster further cooperation between quality assurance agencies and higher education institutions in the EHEA. There is a danger that so-called transparency tools, such as rankings or classifications, could foil the enhancement-driven aspect of quality assurance in higher education by stifling self-critical reflection.

Among ENQA's priorities for the future are to continue the implementation of ESG and the

completion of the cycle of independent external reviews of ENQA member agencies by the end of 2010. Furthermore, ENQA wishes to maintain and intensify the co-operation between quality assurance agencies in the EHEA and to continue the dialogue within the E4 Group on quality and excellence which is of utmost importance for ENQA and for the common good of all stakeholders as well as of the general public.

In September 2009, the ENQA General Assembly mandated its Board to develop a work programme consistent with the elaboration of these principles and priorities. The work programme for 2010 includes the development of a Strategic Plan covering the period 2010-2015, a project to analyse the findings in the review reports arising from the evaluation of quality assurance agencies for ENQA membership purposes and a project to look at the means of supporting developing quality assurance agencies, particularly those in small states and in regions of the EHEA which are not currently represented in ENQA. The establishment of the EHEA can only be achieved by means of constructive and fruitful international co-operation. Taking into consideration the spirit of the ESG, ENQA will continue with its efforts to encourage the exchange of information and experience from all over the EHEA.

The Bologna process has shown strong dynamics but considerable challenges still remain. In countries with a long tradition of single-cycle first degrees, the implementation of some of the Bologna action lines will take some time. ENQA notes this situation and will continue to support the implementation of the aims of the Bologna process.