

ASEM Seminar on Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Sèvres, 11 – 12 October 2012

RECOMMENDATIONS

Upon invitation of the French Ministry of National Education, the Ministry of Higher Education and Research and the ASEM Education Secretariat about 80 experts in quality assurance in higher education met in Sèvres (France) on 11 and 12 October 2012. This seminar was conceived as a follow-up to the ASEM Seminar on Regional Quality Assurance held in Bonn on 5 and 6 July 2011. Possibilities to further enhance cooperation concerning quality assurance in higher education were discussed and proposals were developed to be presented to the 4th Asia Europe Meeting of Ministers for Education (ASEMME 4) to be held in Kuala Lumpur in May 2013.

This seminar was a mandate from the 2nd and 3rd ASEM Meetings of Ministers for Education where the Ministers stressed that quality assurance in higher education should be one of the priority areas for education cooperation between Asia and Europe.

During the seminar, organised in plenary and parallel sessions, reports on the current status of quality assurance in Asia and Europe were presented. The speakers focussed on common principles and practices, on recognition issues, capacity building projects and on the development of pilot programmes, in order to ensure continuity to earlier seminars and conferences offered in the ASEM framework. During the seminar, the participants reaffirmed their will to continue the dialogue and cooperation on quality assurance in higher education. They agreed to focus on realistic proposals that could lead to concrete projects and initiatives.

Common issues emerged from the discussions such as:

- The need to establish a continuous dialogue between quality assurance and recognition specialists in order to better meet the needs of students and graduates and to facilitate their mobility;
- The necessity of opening up the national quality assurance systems in order to develop mutual understanding and trust (mainly through the participation of international evaluators in peer-review panels, international dialogue and co-operation between QA agencies and the mobility of QA professionals);
- The importance of joint projects between quality assurance agencies and professionals from both regions in order to develop quality assurance further and to settle the necessary international dimension of quality assurance activities;
- The need for an all-inclusive dialogue, open to all the quality assurance stakeholders (including students, higher education institutions and government authorities) within Asia and within Europe

as well as across the ASEM region in order to reach a common understanding on and ownership of quality of higher education and its assurance;

- Within the ASEM framework, the need for flexibility in developing instruments for cooperation, to ensure an efficient adaptation to regional and national contexts and to take into account cultural differences;
- The advantages that would result from mobilising and coordinating tools and initiatives and creating synergies between existing ones.

The participants recommended the following:

1. To make the best use of existing quality assurance structures, institutions, tools and instruments in both regions. Among the most realistic possibilities for cooperation, participants have proposed the following:
 - a. To ask ASEM Education Ministries to appoint ASEM quality assurance experts from Quality Assurance agencies, higher education institutions as well as student experts, who will be involved in a continuous dialogue on quality assurance issues in the two regions (travel and accommodation costs related to the attendance in the experts' meetings should be borne by each ASEM member country). To reinforce the development of trust and cooperation, this expert group should be notably tasked to develop a common quality assurance language and understanding, that would seek commonalities between the Higher Education Quality Assurance Principles for the Asia Pacific Region (the so-called "Chiba Principles") and the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (the so-called "ESGs"). Such a group should benefit from the political and financial support from ASEM interested parties. The expert group could build on existing mutual understanding initiatives such as those undertaken by the European Consortium for Accreditation and use the opportunities offered by INQAAHE that already gathers QA agencies from the two regions.
 - b. To better connect the Asia-Pacific Quality network (APQN) and the European Association for Quality Assurance (ENQA) within the ASEM framework, to promote joint cooperation such as sharing of information and good practise, to undertake joint projects with the support of ASEM as well as exchange of quality assurance professionals between both regions.
 - c. To bridge the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (the so-called "Lisbon Recognition Convention") and of the Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific (the so-called "Tokyo Recognition Convention").
 - d. To encourage Quality Assurance Agencies from the Asia Pacific Region to apply, when appropriate, to the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).
 - e. To develop inter-regional pilot schemes, in line with already existing capacity building initiatives such as the ASEAN-QA project.

2. To promote capacity building concerning quality assurance in higher education, by developing joint training programmes for quality assurance between both regions that target all stakeholders in quality assurance. Trans-regional projects aiming at the development of quality assurance capacities should systemically involve several countries from both regions. At the same time, projects aiming at supporting the development of quality assurance in higher education in a single country could be useful too. Such projects could take the form of twinning initiatives involving one or several quality assurance agencies.
3. To develop concrete cooperation between quality assurance and recognition professionals. This could be done by promoting well targeted joint projects like projects aiming at ensuring that the needs of the students in terms of guidance and mobility are met or that the diploma supplements and the processes used for the recognition of diplomas are quality assured. Within the Asia Pacific region, the creation of an easily accessible, multilingual register of trustworthy quality assurance agencies should be explored; possibly taking into account the experience of the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR).
4. To launch pilot projects between both regions on selected themes such as
 - a. The recognition of Quality Assurance Agencies decisions in the context of existing joint degrees between higher education institutions in Asia and Europe.
 - b. The development of a joint ASEM study programme.