

Quality assurance  
in HE and VET in the context of  
NQFs, EQF and QF-EHEA:  
promoting trust between the sectors?

Biograd na Moru, Croatia  
27 June 2013

Impressum:

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Publisher:  
Ministry of Science, Education and Sports

For the publisher:  
Željko Jovanović, PhD, MD, minister

Design:  
KO:KE kreativna farma

Print:  
INTERGRAFIKA TTŽ d.o.o.

Circulation:  
1000

ISBN 978-953-6569-86-1

Zagreb, 2013

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This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.  
This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission  
cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information  
contained therein.

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\_ Biograd na Moru, Croatia, 27 June 2013

## 「INTRODUCTION」

Quality assurance in HE and  
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EQF and QF-EHEA: promoting  
trust between the sectors?

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Foreword

**Ružica Beljo Lučić**  
Assistant Minister  
Ministry of Science, Education and Sports

This publication is a result of the international seminar Quality assurance in Higher Education and VET in the context of NQFs, EQF and QF-EHEA: promoting trust between the sectors? which was held in June 2013 at Biograd na Moru. The seminar was organized following the Conclusions from the Irish Presidency Conference on Quality Assurance in Qualifications Frameworks held in March 2013 and the Irish-Croatian co-chairmanship of the Bologna Follow-up group with the aim of fostering cooperation and exchange of ideas.

Since we all face the same challenges all European countries have recognized the need for joint action in reforming the education. Furthermore, the development of the cooperation in the field of education and training has been recognized as means for reaching the aims of Europe 2020 Strategy. Reform of education and training systems and easier comparability of European education systems are seen as the basis for the creation of a knowledge-based society and economy.

It is clear that European countries are aware of the benefits which cooperation in the field of education can produce. This is confirmed by the agreements on different cooperation processes, namely the Bologna process for higher education, the Copenhagen process for vocational education and training, the Lifelong Learning Programme and the future Erasmus + programme. An important role is also given to the development of transparency tools and the development of national qualifications frameworks.

The increase of quality, efficiency, openness and relevance of the educational system are recognized as means for reaching the EU 2020 and ET 2020 targets. These are in particular related to the increase of participation and attainment levels, upgrading the skills and competences of the workforce and increasing the labour market relevance of education and training systems. It is obvious that actions need to be taken in the overall education and training system while always taking into account that quality must not be undermined.

As a matter of fact the quality assurance and improvement of quality culture is an important aspect of all the initiatives and reforms currently taking place.

Therefore we have decided to organize an international seminar which will tackle the issues of different and similar quality assurance arrangements in higher education and vocational education and training, their relation to the development and implementation of the national qualifications frameworks, the EQF and QF-EHEA and the issue of different quality assurance arrangements for facilitating recognition of qualifications.

Good quality assurance mechanisms, implementation of national qualifications framework and proper use of all the Bologna tools will lead to the development of a mutual trust, which is a precondition for achieving the Bologna and Copenhagen aims of comparability in the standards and quality of qualifications in Europe. In essence, this would lead to the facilitation in the recognition of foreign academic degrees and qualifications.

We would like to thank all the speakers and all the participants who contributed to the publication of this booklet and we hope that you will find the information contained useful for your future work.

## 1.2 Introduction to Quality Assurance in HE and VET in the context of Qualifications Frameworks

**\_ Prof. Dr. Mile Dželalija**  
Member of the EQF Advisory Group  
University of Split, Croatia

### Learning outcomes and qualifications

Learning, including education and training, is fundamentally important to all individuals, businesses and the society at large. All kinds of learning in all kinds of settings (in organised and formal situations such as schools, colleges, etc., and in non-formal and individually informally arranged settings, on-the-job, internet supported, etc.) have a great value for all people in terms of their knowledge, skills and associated competence. However, many benefits to learning arise from the recognised and quality assured formal assessment of achieved competencies and certification of qualifications by competent bodies in governments, businesses, education and training providers, and society as a whole. National qualifications frameworks (NQFs) and quality assurance systems facilitate this formalised recognition of qualifications.

Qualifications, defined as formal outcomes of quality assured validation, assessment and certification processes, influence individuals ability to get a job or access to further education, to carry out an occupation or a profession, to maintain individuals ability to keep parallel with technological changes by pursuing lifelong learning, and even to move between countries for further learning and employment. Such definition of qualifications requires new support for quality assurance of:

- defined standards, including intended learning outcomes and their relevance for individuals and society,
- learning, education and training processes, which support achievement of competences by learners,
- assessment of achieved competences, and
- certification of qualifications.

Quality assurance (QA) is the process of ensuring that education and training, assessment of competencies, and certification of qualifications enable the achievement of excellence as required by a set of standards. Standards of qualifications (including assessment standards of all learning outcomes lined to qualifications) ensure the transparency of the relevant qualifications, which denotes the visibility and clarity of the qualification content as a baseline for the quality of qualifications.

Learning outcomes, including assessment criteria in standards, show what is the content of a qualification, i.e. what a learner knows, understands and is able to do at the end of learning and assessment.

Occupational standards on the other side, describing needed knowledge, skills and competence for specific occupations, are tools for improvement of labour market relevance of qualifications. Occupational standards specify the required work-related competences for occupations, which further inform learning outcomes in qualifications. Implicitly, well designed occupational standards (defining not only profile of required learning outcomes, and qualifications, but also their levels of complexity) can influence education and training – and not only formal or public providers – but also non-formal providers and informal learning.

### Qualifications frameworks

National qualifications frameworks are instruments for the classification of qualifications according to sets of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved. They define national efforts aimed at integrating and coordinating national qualifications subsystems. They have sets of specific aims to improve the transparency, access, progression and quality and relevance of qualifications in relation to the labour markets and civil society needs. They seek to ensure effective comparability of qualifications and credits across the national education systems and facilitate the recognition of those qualifications abroad. NQFs may have different aims, even partially with respect to different parts of national systems. While NQFs are almost always learning outcomes-based, in most countries the orientation and real movement towards learning outcomes approaches is not a radical switch. It is rather a more gradual process.

Newer national qualifications frameworks are much more influenced by external factors, building similar structures of complexity levels and their scopes. They are often linked together by common overarching regional qualifications frameworks, which act as translation devices to make qualifications more readable, understandable and reliable across different countries and qualifications systems in regions.

Two good examples of such overarching qualifications frameworks are the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF) and the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA). Together with referenced national qualifications frameworks, the EQF and QF-EHEA provide powerful platform to support quality assurance systems in European countries and wider.

Essential integral parts of national qualifications frameworks in Europe are agreed criteria and procedures for referencing and self-certification processes to the EQF and the QF-EHEA. Fulfilment of all criteria, procedures and principles, including Common Principles for QA in HE and VET defined in Annex III of the EQF Recommendation, and Standards and Guidelines for QA in the EHEA (ESG) brings the mutual trust amongst all stakeholders.

### Qualifications frameworks to support quality assurance system

It is clear that the added values of NQFs in implementing the EQF and the QF-EHEA will address contemporary issues in implementing common principles for quality assurance and developing the system for validation of non-formal and informal learning. An increasing number of countries are emphasising the importance of making visible and valuing learning that takes place outside formal education and training institutions (for example in leisure time, at home or at work). Non-formal and informal learning very often have outcomes that consist of specific values, which are completely independent of those of formal learning, such as high adaptability to the labour market and individual needs, even if they are not formally recognised. The main issues that arise within the development of national systems for validation of non-formal and informal learning are the reliability and the value of the validation process for non-formal and informal learning comparing to formal learning. There are theoretical analyses for the principle of equal value applied to the validation of non-formal and informal learning and to formal education, based on quality of assessment of learning outcomes, and clear standards. But, still, some knowledge, skills and competence will be necessary to follow only formal education and training processes, including continuous and final assessments.

Only by fulfilment of all criteria, procedures and principles, including the above mentioned Common Principles and Standards and Guidelines for QA in the EHEA we can have confidence that the qualifications are fit for purpose and that those holding qualifications can perform the tasks that society proposes to them, including participating in lifelong learning and working for others or creating new employment for themselves and others. In that sense, further co-operations and partnerships between countries and social partners are very important.



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## 「QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS IN HE AND VET IN RELATION TO NQFs」

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## 2. QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS IN HE AND VET IN RELATION TO NQFs

### 2.1 Creating a strong transparency and trust chain

Colin Tück  
EQAR Director

As part of the Bologna Process, a framework for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) was established at the European level, including agreed standards and guidelines for quality assurance as well as a register of quality assurance agencies. The Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) was developed and adopted in the Bologna Process, whereas the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF-LLL<sup>3</sup>) was developed as a European Union (EU) initiative.

The article addresses the link between quality assurance and qualifications frameworks, with regard to European level instruments and their implementation at national or regional levels.

The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (European Standards and Guidelines, ESG<sup>3</sup>) were developed by the main stakeholders in quality assurance of higher education: higher education institutions (represented by the European University Association, EUA, and the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education, EURASHE), students (European Students' Union, ESU) and quality assurance agencies (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, ENQA).

This reflects one underlying principle of the ESG: quality is “in the eye of the beholder” and quality assurance should thus be a collaborative process, involving the relevant stakeholders. The ESG are further based on the understanding that higher education institutions themselves have the main responsibility for assuring and developing quality of their provision, and that quality assurance needs to combine enhancement-oriented and accountability-gearred aspects.

The ESG address (i) internal quality assurance (at the level of higher education institutions), (ii) external quality assurance (such as external evaluation, accreditation or audit) and (iii) for external quality assurance agencies. They do not contain prescriptive, detailed norms, but leave room for different approaches when implementing them in different institutions, regions or countries.

The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) was founded in 2008 by ENQA, ESU, EUA and EURASHE<sup>4</sup>, following a mandate by ministers (London Communiqué, 2007). EQAR is governed jointly by European stakeholder organizations and EHEA governments that have decided to become governmental members (currently 31 member).

EQAR's mission is to further the development of a coherent and flexible quality assurance system for the EHEA. It provides reliable information on trustworthy and credible quality assurance agencies operating in Europe by managing a register of those agencies that comply substantially with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). Agencies have to evidence compliance in an independent external review of their activities. Through the Register, EQAR aims to:

1. promote trust in quality assurance by registered agencies,
2. enhance recognition of agencies' results and decisions,
3. provide a means for governments to allow higher education institutions to use any registered agency for accreditation/audit, and,
4. support recognition of higher education institutions and programmes accredited/audited/evaluated by registered quality assurance agencies.

The ESG are standards for quality assurance systems and processes. While they define relevant dimensions of quality (e.g. student assessment, teaching staff, support service and resources) they do not in themselves define standards for qualifications. The QF-EHEA and the EQF-LLL are complementary to the ESG, and can be seen as formulating standards for qualifications, in terms of learning outcomes. The QF-EHEA refers to the importance of quality assurance underpinning qualifications frameworks, and notes the emergence

<sup>1</sup> <http://enic-naric.net/index.aspx?s=n&r=ena&d=qf>

<sup>2</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/eqf\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/eqf_en.htm)

<sup>3</sup> Adopted by European ministers responsible for higher education at their Bergen summit in 2005, <http://www.eqar.eu/application/requirements/european-standards-and-guidelines.html>

<sup>4</sup> The same European stakeholder organisations that also drafted the ESG, working together as the “E4 Group”.

of the ESG. While the current ESG do not relate to the QF-EHEA, they are currently being revised and a clearer reference to qualifications framework is amongst the issues that many have asked to be addressed in the revision.

The ESG expect higher education institutions to conduct systematic approval, monitoring and review processes of their programmes. External quality assurance (at programme or institutional level) should be periodical, based on predefined and consistent processes and criteria, and lead to public reports. External quality assurance should be conducted by quality assurance agencies that are independent of government, institutions and stakeholders.

This essence of the ESG corresponds closely with the Common Principles for Quality Assurance that is part of the EQF-LLL (Annex 3). Naturally, the ESG are more elaborate and detailed, as they cover one specific sector, whereas the Common Principles cover all education sectors. One main aspect contained in the ESG, but not in the Common Principles, is the role of independent quality assurance agencies. The learning outcomes approach is currently reflected more directly in the Common Principles than in the ESG.

While the European tools refer to each other and stress the importance of quality assurance underpinning qualifications frameworks in creating trust, the real interaction takes place at the level of higher education institutions, quality assurance agencies and national/regional qualifications frameworks. Together, internal and external quality assurance in line with the ESG and national qualifications frameworks aligned to the QF-EHEA and EQF-LLL can create a “transparency and trust chain” that enhances recognition and mobility of learners.

The paramount role quality assurance systems need to play is to ensure transparency and trust in the assignment of qualifications to the national qualifications framework (NQF) and a specific level. First and foremost, higher education institutions' own approval and review systems need to relate its study programme's learning outcomes to those specified

in the applicable NQF (and further sectoral or other qualifications frameworks, if applicable) at the level of the qualification. External quality assurance systems will have to review and validate that qualifications are correctly assigned to an appropriate level in the NQF. In systems of programme accreditation or evaluation, this can be done specifically for each study programme that is reviewed by a quality assurance agency.

The following examples are part of the criteria for programme accreditation in two countries:

„The study programme complies with the requirements of the [NQF]. [...] [The programme] is built up coherently in the combination of the individual modules with regard to the formulated qualification objectives and provides adequate forms of teaching and learning.” (Germany<sup>5</sup>)

“Based on the curriculum, the institution must account for the interrelation between the competency profile of the study programme and the requirements for either the bachelor, master's or professional master's level in the provisions of the [NQF].” (Denmark<sup>6</sup>)

In a system of institutional accreditation, evaluation or audit, it will instead need to be reviewed whether the institution's own systems of aligning its qualifications with the NQF are credible, robust and valid.

The following example is from a system of institutional audits (UK<sup>7</sup>):

“[HE providers] ensure that the requirements of [NQF] are met by:

1. positioning their qualifications at the appropriate level of the framework
2. ensuring that programme outcomes align with the relevant qualification descriptor in the framework

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.akkreditierungsrat.de/fileadmin/Seiteninhalte/AR/Beschluesse/en/AR\\_Regeln\\_Studiengaenge\\_en\\_aktuell.pdf](http://www.akkreditierungsrat.de/fileadmin/Seiteninhalte/AR/Beschluesse/en/AR_Regeln_Studiengaenge_en_aktuell.pdf) [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/eqf\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/eqf_en.htm)

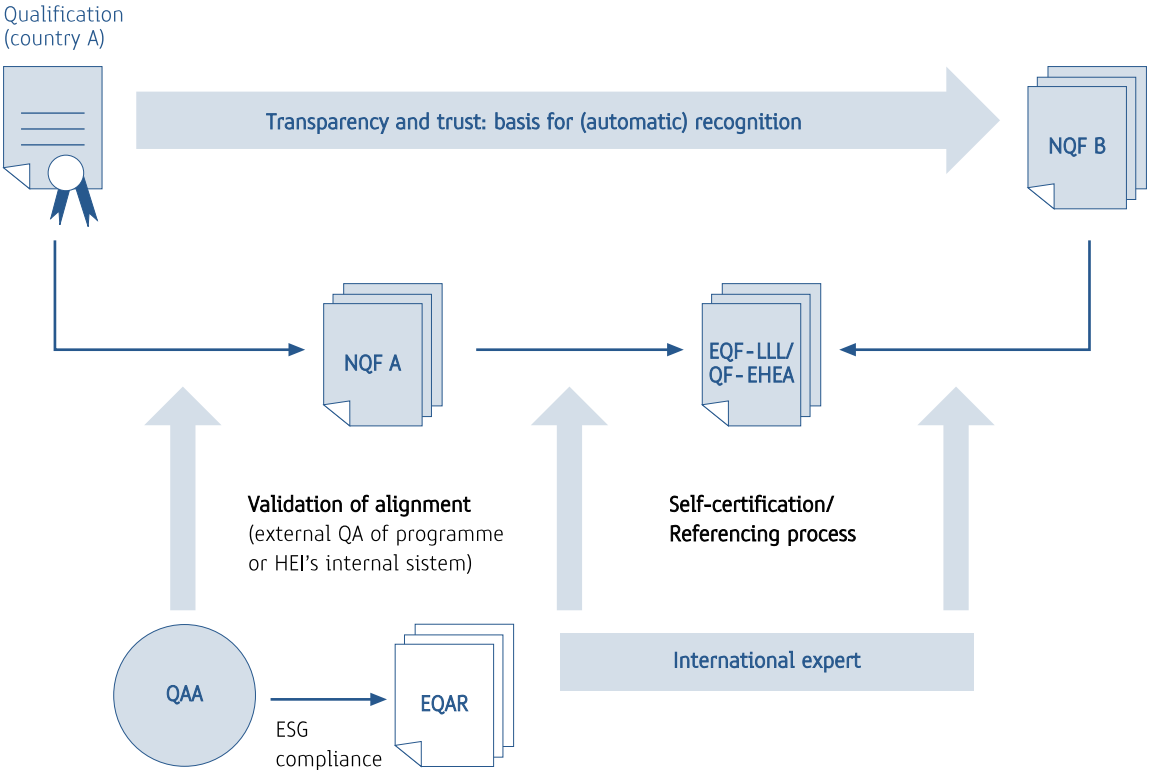
<sup>6</sup> [http://acedenmark.eu/fileadmin/user\\_upload/dokumenter/Akkreditering\\_dokumenter/Vejledningner\\_EN\\_Vejledning\\_eksisterende\\_uddannelser\\_2012\\_English.pdf](http://acedenmark.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/dokumenter/Akkreditering_dokumenter/Vejledningner_EN_Vejledning_eksisterende_uddannelser_2012_English.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/Part-A-Draft-Consultation.pdf>

3. naming qualifications in accordance with the guidance
4. awarding qualifications to mark the achievement of positively defined learning outcomes”

Eventually, via its respective NQF every qualification is clearly linked to one level in the QF-EHEA and EQF-LLL. External quality assurance by an ESG-compliant,

EQAR-registered agency, on the one hand, and the self-certification/referencing process of the NQF against the European frameworks, on the other hand, ensure that this link is valid and trustworthy. Through this transparency and trust chain every qualification has a clear place in the European qualifications structure and, consequently, can be “mapped” to every other system in the EHEA.



Drawing 1\_ QA and QF building up a transparency and trust chain

In their Bucharest Communiqué<sup>8</sup>, European ministers responsible for higher education agreed to:

1. allow EQAR-registered agencies to perform their activities across the EHEA, while complying with national requirements.
2. work together towards the automatic recognition of comparable academic degrees, building on the tools of the Bologna framework, as a long-term goal of the EHEA.
3. encourage higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies to assess institutional recognition procedures in internal and external quality assurance.
4. invite countries that cannot finalize the implementation of national qualifications frameworks compatible with QF-EHEA by the end of 2012 to redouble their efforts.

The long-term goal of “automatic recognition” reflects the ambition that the different tools developed in the Bologna Process should function together more smoothly and lead to more seamless recognition between EHEA countries – a role that goes beyond serving as voluntary frameworks or information tools that might aid recognition decisions, but do not necessarily guarantee recognition of qualifications.

A law<sup>9</sup> recently adopted by the Flemish Community of Belgium is one example of how the future role of quality assurance and qualifications framework might look like: on the basis of qualifications frameworks (aligned to EQF-LLL and QF-EHEA) and quality assurance (by an EQAR-registered agency) degrees from other EHEA countries will be automatically recognized in Flanders.

Quality assurance and qualifications frameworks working hand in hand are paramount to make “automatic recognition” work in practice. They can serve as the building blocks of a more seamless EHEA – made up of diverse and unique higher education systems that are yet closely linked through their common core structure, and in which moving from one country to another is

not more difficult than moving from one university to another in the same country.

<sup>8</sup> April 2012, <http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/%281%29/Bucharest%20Communique%202012%281%29.pdf>  
<sup>9</sup> <http://docs.vlaamsparlament.be/docs/stukken/2012-2013/g2066-7.pdf> (p. 126)



## 2.2 EQAVET - Supporting European quality assurance in Vocational Education and Training

**Dana Stroie**  
National Centre for TVET Development, Romania  
Member of EQAVET Steering Committee

The society transformation processes registered during the past years, the transition to post-industrialism and to a knowledge-based society present numerous challenges for the vocational education and training (VET) system. Besides ensuring access to education, the acquirement of high level of qualifications, the relevance and quality of learners' training becomes even more significant. In this context, quality assurance (QA) in VET acquires new capacities and implies new institutional roles.

QA in VET is a key instrument in building trust across and within Member States, in order to strengthen mobility, permeability and flexibility of learning pathways. It has

an essential role in the achievement of major objectives related to vocational training, set at a European level: a better correlation between training demand and provision, an increase in the employment capacity and improvement of access to VET, especially concerning vulnerable groups.

The target set by the *Barcelona European Council* in 2002, of making Europe's education and training systems a world quality reference by 2010, puts the quality issue at the heart of the community policy agenda in a relatively long timescale. *The Copenhagen Declaration*<sup>10</sup> sets out QA as a main priority in VET, by "promoting cooperation in quality assurance with particular focus on

exchange of models and methods, as well as common criteria and principles for quality in vocational education and training".

In 2009, the *Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQARF)* established a reference instrument to help Member States to promote and monitor continuous improvement of their VET systems based on common European references. EQARF comprises a *quality assurance and improvement cycle* of planning, implementation, evaluation/assessment and review/revision of VET, supported by *common quality criteria, indicative descriptors and indicators*. EQARF is applied at the VET-system, VET-provider and qualification-awarding levels:

### The EQAVET Quality Cycle<sup>11</sup>

The Recommendation emphasizes that EQARF should „support LifeLong Learning (LLL) strategies and the implementation of the EQF and of the European Quality Charter for Mobility, and promote a culture of quality improvement and innovation at all levels. Extra emphasis should be placed on the transition from VET to higher education (HE)".

In line with the Recommendation, an EQAVET network was set up in 2009, as a community of practice bringing together Member States, Social Partners and the European Commission with the aim to promote European collaboration in development and improvement of QA in VET by using EQARF.

One of the key objectives of *EQAVET network 2013 – 2015 Working programme*, is to „support actions at EU level

contributing to the overall EU goal of making LLL and mobility a reality". The focus at this level is on QA to boost VET mobility, which implies close cooperation with other education and training sub-sectors (in particular HE) and other EU initiatives (such as EQF and ECVET). Also, more work is needed in order to explore the QA approaches used in VET and HE in order to promote greater permeability and transparency of qualifications and to enable learners to move more easily within and between systems.

As part of the *EQAVET network 2013 – 2015 working programme*, a Quality Assurance in VET and HE seminar will be organized by EQAVET in conjunction with CEDEFOP in October 2013, in order to identify the priorities and establish appropriate partnerships to support an on-going cooperation on QA issues between VET and HE in order to promote mobility and permeability. The seminar aims to define future areas for an enhanced cooperation and joint work, as well as to reflect on QA issues related with work-based learning, integrating the new forms of learning and accreditation.

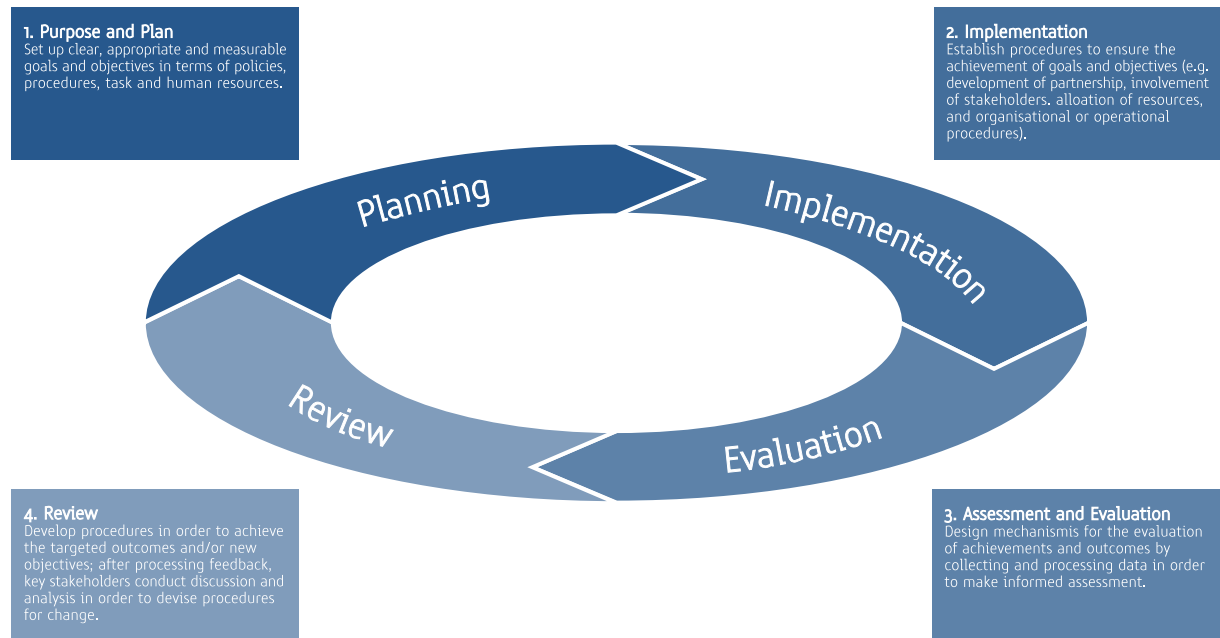
Strengthening of cooperation on QA issues between VET and HE is facilitated by the commonalities and convergences of principles and instruments of EQAVET and of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*, in terms of:

Common principles:

- explicit and strong European dimension
- subsidiarity - voluntary approach by the Member States
- Focus on:
  - stakeholders' needs, especially on the needs of students and employers
  - QA mechanisms at providers' level
  - QA developments on a LLL perspective

Common methodological approach at provider level, in terms of:

- Using self-assessment as a pillar of the QA system
- Involving stakeholders across the whole QA cycle
- Developing evidence based QA mechanisms



**Drawing 2\_ The Quality Cycle of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training**

- Focusing on the QA of students' learning outcomes
- Emphasizing the role of quality improvement

The Communication “*Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes*”, from 2012, specifies areas of mutual interest for VET and HE. The Communication emphasises strong need for promotion of work based learning which includes quality traineeships, apprenticeships and dual learning models to help the transition from learning to work. Also, further work should be directed at promotion of partnerships between public and private institutions (to ensure appropriate curricula and skills provision) and promotion of education, business and research. Promotion of mobility and creation of *European Area for Skills and Qualifications* is necessary in order to promote a stronger convergence between the EU transparency and recognition tools thus ensuring that skills and qualifications can be easily recognized across borders, based on on-going evaluations and pursuing the learning-outcomes approach. Funding Education for Growth – analysis of the benefits of investment in different education and training sectors (vocational training, adult learning, and higher education) and ways to increase the efficiency of spending is also identified as one of specific areas of interest.

In conclusion, regarding QA developments, VET and HE face similar changes and can learn from each other's' experiences, as each of them have unique strengths and can mutually benefit through a long term partnership.

## 2.3 European tools as catalysts for quality assurance in VET – Current developments in Austria

– Stephanie Mayer

*“Europe is trying to recover from a severe economic and financial crisis. Unemployment rates are high – in particular amongst young people. The crisis has emphasized the need to reform our economies and societies. Europe wants to become smarter, more sustainable and more inclusive. To achieve this we need flexible, high quality education and training systems which respond to the needs of today and tomorrow.”<sup>12</sup>*

Educational systems find themselves increasingly confronted with rapidly changing demands and constantly rising expectations. The impact of new technologies and altering methods of teaching and learning make great demands on professionalism. It is vital to prepare students for future demands in their personal and professional lives. Therefore, steering of educational systems requires taking into consideration societal changes in a constant process of observing, estimating and anticipating, and in the testing and further development of educational policies and pedagogical instruments.

Quality assurance and quality development in education and training have recently gained considerable importance throughout European education and training policies. Political impetus was provided by the Bruges Communiqué in December 2010, which drew a vision of highly attractive VET systems to be realized by the year 2020, defined by high levels of quality and flexibility and based on the consistent use of the concept of learning outcomes.

In the Austrian case VET is provided within a highly diversified system, offering a wide variety of training opportunities and school types. This variety allows for the delivery of individualized and learner-centered education and training programs under consideration of regional and local specificities and the respective labour market structure.

The national implementation of European tools and initiatives such as the EQF, and ECVET accounts for the specifics of the Austrian system and places quality of

education and training for all students at all levels on top of the agenda. In the process of implementation, these tools have emerged as much more than mere transparency tools – they have emerged as triggers for quality improving and assuring processes within the Austrian education and training system. Through the establishment of a common language of learning outcomes they support the necessary attunement of labour market demand and education system supply, raise trust in education and training programs, and play an important role in the improvement of students' employability and access to mobility and further education.

In Austria, the implementation of several initiatives and instruments has recently been strategically designed to contribute to quality development, both explicitly and implicitly. QIBB is the strategic approach initiated in 2004 by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture towards implementation of a comprehensive quality management system within the Austrian school-based VET system in line with the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET). Quality assurance and development initiatives taken within the context of QIBB are intended to contribute to heightening the level of education as well as to improving recognition of acquired qualifications. The core element of QIBB consists in a peer-reviewed quality management system, which serves the systematic assurance and development of quality of teaching, school inspection as well as school administration. The main focus lies on the pedagogic practice (initiating, supporting and accompanying of school-based education and training processes) as well as processes and practices employed within the administrative system (establishment, assurance and development of parameters necessary to allow for qualitative teaching and learning). QIBB is a challenge worth being taken by educational institutions at all levels of the system. VET schools and colleges take the necessary steps towards school autonomy, sustainable development of schooling and tuition, and towards perceivably improved teaching for their students.

Alongside quality initiatives dedicated explicitly to quality assurance and development, the implementation

<sup>12</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/vocational/brug es\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/vocational/brug es_en.pdf)

of other European instruments can be seen as implicitly contributing to quality development through fostering a wider use of learning outcomes. The Austrian NQF, for example, makes an indirect contribution to quality development through pursuing its strategic aims of translating between and within the wide landscape of qualification providers and sectors, of enhancing communication and cooperation between stakeholders, and of anchoring a learning-outcomes-based way of thinking in national curricula.

The process of referencing the Austrian NQF towards the EQF triggers a complex process of discourse and trust building, which goes far beyond developing quality of the referencing process itself, right to the core of educational programs – the national curricula. In the process of applying for inclusion in the NQF/ EQF education and training providers are increasingly becoming aware of the added value of the transparency instrument for their educational programs and are motivated and supported to comply with the formal requirements of inclusion and referencing through reforming their curricula, syllabi and assessment procedures, using the EQFs description of learning outcomes. This way the EQF exerts a deep impact on our education systems by anchoring the concept of learning outcomes in national curricula, as well as in syllabi of non-formal education programs, and thereby enhancing transparency within a zone of mutual trust.

The Austrian strategy to implement ECVET foresees a credit system that is compatible and consistent with the credit system used in higher education ECTS, therefore a credit system that can be used to build bridges between educational institutions and sectors. Synergies to be established with other European instruments will further trigger discourse and cooperation between sectors and institutions and will help to expand the zone of mutual trust established in the NQF context. Students attending education and training programs in both IVET and CVET should benefit noticeably from the ECVET initiative as programs will be increasingly described transparently and consistently in terms of NQF compatible learning outcomes, which will add to comparability of programs and therefore facilitate learners' orientation within the system. In the context of mobilities and internships

learners' should be able to perceive an increase in quality of their experience through the systematic and structured formulation of learning agreements and partnerships. In January 2005 the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture started their work on developing educational standards in school-based initial VET. Educational standards are conceptualized to describe the core competences that students of a certain educational program are expected to have acquired upon completion. They are an important instrument to support competence-based teaching and focus on generic competences, vocation specific competences, as well as social and personal competences. They support new methods of teaching and are an important means to support the development and implementation of the reformed, competence-based national curricula.

Provided the high priority of quality assurance and development on European and national agendas, Austria is currently designing, implementing, and interlinking the above tools in an ambition to increase trust, transparency and excellence of the Austrian VET system. Synergies are being established as an efficient way of maximizing their impact and added value and to take VET one step closer to the 2020 vision depicted by the Bruges Communiqué (2010):

*“Given the role of VET in European societies and economies, it is crucial to ensure the sustainability and excellence of vocational education and training. If Europe is to maintain its position as the strongest exporter of industrial products in the world, it must have world class VET. In the knowledge society vocational skills and competences are just as important as academic skills and competences. The diversity of European VET systems is an asset for mutual learning. But transparency and a common approach to quality assurance are necessary to build up mutual trust which will facilitate mobility and recognition of skills and competences between those systems. In the decade ahead we must give high priority to quality assurance in our European cooperation in VET<sup>13</sup>.”*

<sup>13</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/vocational/bruges\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/vocational/bruges_en.pdf)



\_ Biograd na Moru, Croatia, 27 June 2013

# QUALITY ASSURANCE ARRANGEMENTS FOR FACILITATING RECOGNITION OF FOREIGN QUALIFICATIONS

Quality assurance in HE and  
VET in the context of NQFs,  
EQF and QF-EHEA: promoting  
trust between the sectors?



## 3. QUALITY ASSURANCE ARRANGEMENTS FOR FACILITATING RECOGNITION OF FOREIGN QUALIFICATIONS

### 3.1 Qualifications Frameworks to facilitate recognition: new subsidiary text to the Lisbon Recognition Convention

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Policies and practices on recognition and on qualifications frameworks have been, to some extent, developed independently. During recent years, however, this separation has been challenged for a number of reasons. Perhaps the most obvious is that qualifications frameworks and recognition are, among many other things, designed to support individuals to better understand qualifications and move within and between education systems. The fair recognition of foreign qualifications is essential to the European Higher Education Area. There are evident links and interdependencies between recognition and qualifications frameworks. Qualifications frameworks give important information about qualifications for recognition purposes. Most recently another important step has been taken to bring these policy areas closer at a practical level.

In terms of academic recognition of qualifications, the key document is the Council of Europe/UNESCO 'Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region' ('Lisbon Recognition Convention'), which was adopted in 1997.<sup>14</sup> At the time of writing 53 countries have ratified the Convention and another two countries – Canada and the United States – have signed but have not ratified it. The importance of the Lisbon Convention is even more far-reaching since several countries apply the Convention principles also to applicants whose qualifications originate from countries that have not ratified the Convention.

In the Bologna Process the Ministers have underlined the importance of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and they have given their strong support to the fundamental principles of the Convention: all applicants have the right to a fair assessment of their qualifications within a reasonable time limit and according to transparent, coherent and reliable procedures and without discrimination. To the extent that recognition is based on the knowledge and skills certified by the higher education qualification, recognition should be granted, unless there are substantial differences between the qualification of the applicant and the corresponding qualification in the receiving country.

Even if the Lisbon Recognition Convention is very explicit

in its key principles, the text is relatively general. In order to provide guidance and to ensure as homogenous an implementation as possible, the Convention Committee has adopted subsidiary texts. These texts cover a wide range of issues, as indicated also in their titles: the Recommendation on International Access Qualifications, the Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications and Periods of Study, the Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education, and the Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees.

In June 2013 the Convention Committee, after a lengthy and thorough preparatory work by the Committee Bureau and ENIC/NARIC Network<sup>15</sup> adopted a new subsidiary text: the 'Recommendation on the use of qualifications frameworks in the recognition of foreign qualifications'.<sup>16</sup> This subsidiary text establishes the link between qualifications frameworks and recognition and it focuses on the use of qualifications frameworks as important information and transparency tools in the recognition of higher education qualifications and qualifications giving access to higher education. It also provides principles and guidelines on how qualifications frameworks can facilitate fair recognition generally, and the assessment of individual qualifications in particular. It also states that national qualifications frameworks facilitate recognition especially when they have been linked in a transparent and comparative way – through self-certification and referencing – to the overarching frameworks, such as the overarching framework of qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) and/or the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF). It is designed to demonstrate ways in which qualifications frameworks may be helpful in establishing similarities between foreign qualifications and relevant qualifications in the system in which recognition is sought.

<sup>14</sup> Further information is available here: <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/QueVoulezVous.asp?NT=165&CL=ENG>

<sup>15</sup> European Network of Information Centers and National Academic Recognition Centers

<sup>16</sup> [www.enic-naric.net](http://www.enic-naric.net)

More specifically, the Recommendation establishes recognition principles relating to level, learning outcomes, quality and workload:

- In relation to *level*, the recommendation stipulates that if a national qualifications framework has been self-certified (QF-EHEA) or referenced (EQF), there is, as a general rule, no need to investigate the level of qualifications further. If a foreign qualification has been linked to the same level in the overarching framework as the relevant qualification in the host country, the two should be seen as broadly compatible. If level discrepancy occurs, qualification specific information (including the formal rights the foreign qualification gives in the awarding country) should be used, among other things, to determine the level.
- In terms of *learning outcomes*, those described in frameworks are likely to be generic and therefore provide a reference point for recognition. Where learning outcomes provided by the qualifications frameworks are insufficient for recognition purposes, the more detailed descriptions of learning outcomes provided by institutions should be used. The description of learning outcomes in the Diploma Supplement is useful for recognition purposes.
- According to the recommendation, a transparent link between recognition, qualifications frameworks and *quality assurance* should be established. If a national qualifications framework has been self-certified or referenced, the assumption is that the individual qualifications included in the framework by the competent authority are quality assured. Therefore, as a general rule there is no need for the recognition authority to investigate the quality of the qualification.
- Even if qualifications should be assessed on the basis of learning outcomes as much as possible, competent recognition authorities may also be guided in their assessment by the *workload* learners are required to undertake in order to obtain the given qualification. As noted in the Recommendation, this is usually expressed in credits and indicates the typical

workload necessary to achieve the learning outcomes associated with a qualification.

The mere existence of the Recommendation is not yet enough to make sure those qualifications frameworks are used to support recognition of qualifications. The ENIC/NARIC Networks, as well as individual recognition centres, are important stakeholders in implementing the Recommendation and developing its principles further. Behind the relatively broad principles of the Recommendation are many details which must be discussed further. This discussion will occur in different contexts, for instance ENIC/NARICs, EQF National Coordination Points, Network of national correspondents, and through the process of the implementation of the national qualifications frameworks.

For qualifications frameworks to support recognition, trust in the work on national level, as well as in self-certification and referencing processes is of critical importance. On national level, transparent and rigorous analysis of qualifications (and their learning outcomes) in the awarding country, before they are levelled to the national framework is required. On European level, the jointly agreed criteria and procedures for the self-certification and referencing processes create trust in the process and its outcomes. Implementation of the principles of the Recommendation – and the further development of these principles – also highlights the importance of co-operation between those responsible for recognition of qualifications and those responsible for qualifications frameworks.

### 3.2 UK NARIC: Recognition of Academic, Vocational and Professional Qualifications

[\\_ Angela Kee](#)  
UK NARIC (The National Recognition Information Centre for the United Kingdom)  
Head of Research and Data

UK NARIC (The National Recognition Information Centre for the United Kingdom) is the UK's National Agency for providing information and opinion on international academic, vocational and professional qualifications and skills. Providing recognition guidance to individuals via a public enquiry line and through written *Statements of Comparability*, UK NARIC also supports key stakeholders (universities, colleges, careers advisors, government departments, professional bodies and commercial organisations) through its membership services including a range of online databases, publications, training and a member enquiry system.

The core UK NARIC database, *International Comparisons*, currently boasts comprehensive information on 181 countries worldwide and 17 other territories/regions. This includes a databank of 3772 qualifications, including more than 560 professional qualifications and titles. Such a wealth of data is used not only by UK NARIC but also by 811 stakeholder organisations to help thousands of individuals gain the invaluable recognition of their qualifications needed for such purposes as applications for further education, employment and visas.

In addition to the UK NARIC contract, ECCTIS Ltd, a private limited company, also manages a number of other national agencies on behalf of the British Government, including the UK NEC, UK NCP, ECVET England and UK ReferNet.

UK NARIC also forms part of a wider network of information centres (ENIC-NARIC network) across Europe and beyond, including Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA. The aim being to provide and share information to aid and promote best practice in the recognition of foreign qualifications and education, ultimately easing mobility.

Much research has been undertaken to determine the best practice in credential evaluation. One practical tool to aid credential evaluators is the European Area of Recognition (EAR) manual. UK NARIC, in partnership with six other NARICs (the Netherlands, Poland, France, Denmark, Lithuania, Czech Republic), undertook the EAR project to develop a recognition manual containing standards and guidelines based on the Lisbon

Recognition Convention, to promote best practice within recognition centres as well as serving as a valuable tool for educational stakeholders such as international admissions staff.

In addition to adhering to the principles set out in the EAR Manual, UK NARIC has its own Code of Practice for recognition of international qualifications to ensure that the information provided and decisions made are consistent and transparent, and ultimately supports an enhanced understanding of international qualifications.

Central to the assessment of international qualifications is the understanding of where a qualification sits within the national context, its entry routes and progression pathways on completion. In this regard the value of national qualification frameworks in the recognition framework cannot be emphasised enough: qualification frameworks facilitate recognition by bringing better transparency and clarity to education systems and the qualification levels and progressions routes within them.

Although a number of countries have qualification frameworks, there are still some key differences in the way in which they have been designed. In both the UK and the wider European Higher Education Area (EHEA) for example, there has been a clear shift away from traditional rigid frameworks based on programme durations toward more flexible outcome-based frameworks capable of encompassing different educational strands and learning pathways. A good example of this shift is the replacement of the former National Qualifications Framework with the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) of England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Given the diversity of the recognition needs, not to mention the different education systems in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, UK NARIC has designed a unique and flexible system for recognition. The methodology is based upon the key principles of credential evaluation, closely adhering to the principles laid out in the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

Comparisons are derived using the *NARIC Band Framework*<sup>17</sup> as a reference point, allowing for fine distinctions to be made between educational levels represented by a broad range of academic, vocational and professional international qualifications. Each qualification is placed at a certain level within the *Band Framework*, based on an evaluation of criteria. It should be noted that one criterion does not dominate in the assessment procedure, leading to a balanced and useful assessment of overseas awards.

The UK NARIC evaluation criteria take into account the needs of the national system in question and consider whether an applicant is adequately qualified to enter the further or higher education system in the country in question or sufficiently well-trained to perform a certain occupational or professional role (taking into account European Directives and other relevant transnational legislation or arrangements).

In essence, the *Band Framework* serves as a reference point, designed to ensure accuracy and consistency of comparability statements accorded to international qualifications. It is designed to represent all different types of international qualification and provide meaningful linkages to the most similar UK awards. The term 'band' is used to reflect the broad grouping of international qualifications that may be categorised together, focussing on a qualification's learning outcomes and on the progression routes available.

However, it is not intended as a mechanism for the direct comparison of framework to framework qualifications, but the organisation of the levels provides a hierarchy within which qualifications can be more clearly understood. In this respect the band framework should not be viewed as an alignment of existing qualifications frameworks. The UK NARIC methodological approach recognises the importance of learning outcomes achieved through various paths and progression routes and therefore facilitates recognition of not only 'national awards' with their differing entry points and purposes, but also less common qualifications

<sup>17</sup> See appendix.

such as joint diplomas, which vary significantly from system-specific national awards. Therefore, traditional and lifelong learning and transnational education study routes can all be accommodated and assessed using the UK NARIC model for recognition.

Appendix

NARIC Band Framework

NARIC Band	Band Descriptor	Comparison Statements
15	Qualifications that recognise higher achievement in academia, where recorded.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Comparable to British Post-Doctoral standard and above</li></ul>
14	Qualifications that reflect the ability to develop original ideas and concepts in a highly specialised area. Work undertaken at this level is at the very forefront of the chosen discipline and contributes to the advancement of knowledge in that area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Comparable to British Doctor of Philosophy degree (PhD) standard</li><li>Comparable to SQA Professional Development Award (SCQF level 12) standard</li></ul>
13	Qualifications that enable holders to make a significant contribution to their chosen subject area. Individuals possess highly developed critical analysis, interpretation and evaluation skills that can be applied to complex concepts and theories in order to formulate their own ideas. Individuals can make key contributions to the development and planning of organisations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Comparable to British Master of Philosophy degree (MPhil) standard</li></ul>
12	Qualifications that provide holders with highly specialised knowledge and understanding of a chosen area. Individuals possess critical analysis, interpretation and evaluation skills that can be applied to complex concepts and theories in order to formulate their own ideas. In academic terms, individuals are able to undertake independent research activities. Individuals can make key contributions to the development and planning of organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Comparable to British Master's degree standard</li></ul>

11	Qualifications that provide holders with detailed knowledge and understanding of a chosen area. Individuals possess critical analysis, interpretation and evaluation skills that can be applied to complex concepts and theories in order to formulate their own ideas. Individuals can undertake key developmental and managerial roles at this level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Comparable to British Postgraduate Diploma standard</li><li>Comparable to N/SVQ level 5 standard</li><li>Comparable to British Postgraduate Certificate standard</li><li>Comparable to SQA Professional Development Award (SCQF level 11) standard</li></ul>
10	Qualifications that enable holders to use their detailed knowledge and understanding to develop appropriate methodologies and apply appropriate techniques to complex problems and issues within a specialised subject or discipline. Individuals have complete autonomy and are able to use initiative in professional situations which are subject to change. They may also hold significant managerial responsibility.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Comparable to British Bachelor (Honours) degree standard <sup>[1]</sup></li><li>Comparable to SQA Professional Development Award (SCQF level 10) standard</li><li>Comparable to Graduate Certificate / Graduate Diploma standard</li><li>Comparable to British Bachelor degree standard, offering access to the FHEQ second cycle of study</li></ul>
9	Qualifications that provide holders with a critical understanding of some of the main principles, theories, concepts and terminology in a specific subject or discipline. Individuals work autonomously and are able to use initiative in some professional situations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Comparable to British Bachelor (Ordinary) degree standard</li><li>Comparable to Scottish Master's (Ordinary) degree standard (at Scottish Ancient universities)<sup>[2]</sup></li><li>Comparable to SQA Professional Development Award (SCQF level 9) standard</li></ul>
8	Qualifications that enable holders to apply detailed knowledge to address complex problems and issues within broadly defined parameters. Individuals have complete autonomy within a defined area of specialisation, and may hold some managerial responsibility.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Comparable to Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE)</li><li>Comparable to Foundation degree standard</li><li>Comparable to BTEC / SQA Higher National Diploma (HND) standard</li><li>Comparable to N/SVQ level 4 / SQA Professional Development Award (SCQF level 8) standard</li></ul>
7	Qualifications that enable holders to analyse, interpret, evaluate and apply knowledge to solve a range of problems. Individuals are responsible for their own work and also, to a more limited extent, that of others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Comparable to Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE) standard</li><li>Comparable to BTEC / SQA Higher National Certificate (HNC) standard</li></ul>



6	Qualifications that provide holders with the capacity to interpret, evaluate and apply knowledge in a defined area. Individuals work with considerable autonomy and could be expected to act in a supervisory capacity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Comparable to a standard between BTEC National Diploma / Certificate / Award and BTEC Higher National Certificate / SQA Professional Development Award (SCQF level 7)</li><li>• Comparable to Scottish Baccalaureate standard</li><li>• Comparable to a standard between N/SVQ level 3 and N/SVQ level 4 standard</li></ul>
5	Qualifications that enable holders to interpret information and ideas and apply knowledge in specific subject areas or disciplines. They may provide an appropriate exit point to employment in roles with considerable autonomy and some supervisory capacity, although academically oriented awards at this level typically provide access to Higher Education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Comparable to the overall GCE Advanced / Scottish Advanced Higher standard</li><li>• Comparable to Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) / BTEC National Diploma / Certificate / Award standard / SQA Professional Development Award (SCQF level 7)</li><li>• Comparable to N/SVQ level 3 standard</li></ul>
4	Qualifications that enable holders to interpret information and ideas and apply knowledge in several subject areas or disciplines. Activities can be carried out independently within clearly defined parameters and may involve limited supervisory responsibility. Completion at this level allows for access to HE qualifications.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Comparable to GCE Advanced Subsidiary (AS) level / Scottish Higher standard</li><li>• Comparable to VCE Advanced Subsidiary (AS) level / SQA National Certificate at SCQF level 6 / SQA Professional Development Award (SCQF level 6) / SQA National Progression Award at SCQF level 6 standard</li><li>• Comparable to SQA Awards at SCQF level 6 and above standard</li></ul>
3	Qualifications providing holders with the relevant knowledge and understanding to address problems and carry out the appropriate tasks and activities with limited direction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Comparable to a standard between GCSE and GCE AS level</li><li>• Comparable to a standard between BTEC First Diploma and BTEC National Diploma / SQA National Certificate at SCQF level 6</li><li>• Comparable to a standard between N/SVQ level 2 and N/SVQ level 3</li></ul>
2	Qualifications providing holders with the basic knowledge and understanding to address straightforward problems with directional guidance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Comparable to GCSE (grades A*-C) / Credit Standard Grade standard</li><li>• Comparable to VGCSE (grades A*-C) / BTEC First Diploma / SQA Intermediate 2 standard</li><li>• Comparable to N/SVQ level 2 standard</li><li>• Comparable to SQA National Certificate at SCQF level 5 / SQA National Progression Award at SCQF level 5 standard</li><li>• Comparable to SQA Award at SCQF levels 5 standard</li></ul>

1	Qualifications demonstrating basic knowledge of a specific subject or discipline. Straightforward tasks can be completed under appropriate supervision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Comparable to GCSE (grades D-G) / General Standard Grade standard</li><li>• Comparable to VGCSE (grades D-G) standard / Intermediate 1 standard</li><li>• Comparable to N/SVQ level 1 standard</li><li>• Comparable to SQA National Certificate at SCQF level 4 / SQA National Progression Award at SCQF level 4 standard</li><li>• Comparable to SQA Award at SCQF levels 4 standard</li></ul>
Entry Level	Qualifications focussing on basic skills and knowledge to enable individuals to actively participate in familiar environments. Simple, directed tasks can be completed under appropriate supervision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Comparable to Entry levels 1, 2, 3 / SQA Access 1, 2, 3 units / SQA Access 2 and 3 National Courses / Foundation level Standard Grade / SQA Awards at SCQF levels 1, 2, 3 standard</li><li>• Comparable to SQA National Certificate at SCQF levels 2 and 3 / SQA National Progression Award at SCQF levels 2 and 3 standard</li></ul>

### 3.3 Quality assurance in recognition of foreign qualifications

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on Structural Reforms

Recognition of foreign qualifications has been one among major Bologna principles and objectives and an essential precondition for both academic and professional mobility. Fair academic and professional recognition, as stated in the Bucharest Communiqué, *improves graduates' chances of professional mobility and it represents an accurate measure of the degree of convergence and trust attained*. Moreover, the Ministers for higher education agreed in Bucharest *to set the objective to remove outstanding obstacles hindering effective and proper recognition, willing to work together towards the automatic recognition of comparable academic degrees, building on the tools of the Bologna framework, as a long-term goal of the EHEA*.

Pursued by the BFUG and in particular by the EHEA Working Group on Structural Reforms to integrated approach in the policy areas of qualifications frameworks, quality assurance, recognition of qualifications and transparency, aiming to improve instruments for structural reform (QF, QA, recognition of qualifications, transparency instruments) it has been admitted that more efforts were needed in order to reach better coherence between the main elements of structural reforms.

On the other side, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is an instrument aimed at promoting workers' and learners' mobility and lifelong learning through development and subsequent referencing of national qualifications systems. Consequently, implementation of the EQF contributes to reaching EU2020 and ET2020 targets such as target on labour and learning mobility through providing more transparency and comparability between qualifications systems. Recognition of qualifications is therefore an important issue for the successful and trustworthy implementation of the EQF.

It is therefore important to reflect on how development of the NQFs and their referencing to the EQF and self-certification to the QF EHEA could contribute to the simplification of the recognition procedures without endangering quality and allowing for more learning and working mobility within the EU and the EHEA.

In the establishment of their recognition policies, countries cooperating under the frameworks of the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Convention are recommended to take into account the principles set out in the *Revised Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications* adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee in June 2010, more notably to develop procedures and criteria that are transparent, coherent, reliable and flexible with a view to making recognition possible, assuring all applicants a fair consideration of their application. Moreover, the competent recognition authorities are also invited to refer to the National Qualifications Frameworks and European Qualifications Framework as part of the assessment process.

The Croatian case demonstrates how the adoption of the CROQF Act gave rise to changes in the regulatory framework of recognition of foreign qualifications. The new legislative framework for the recognition of foreign qualifications, that is currently being developed, takes into account the assessment criteria set up in the *Revised Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications*, most notably the level, profile, volume (workload) and quality of foreign qualifications. According to the Recommendation, recognition of foreign qualifications should be granted unless there is a substantial difference between the qualification for which recognition is requested and the relevant qualification in the country in which recognition is sought. The most challenging part is to identify whether there are substantial differences in level, profile, volume and quality, based on the assessment of learning outcomes of a foreign qualification and with a view to the comparability of learning outcomes and access to further activities such as further study or employment. Moreover, the recognition authorities should assess the quality of the institution and the programme taking into account the status of the institution and programme through which the qualification was awarded and the results of a formal assessment of a higher education institution and a programme.

In this respect, Croatian newly designed regulatory framework advocates that all of the Bologna tools should be used in order to make a thorough and fair assessment

of a foreign qualification. According to the draft act, the competent authority should make use of the NQFs on the basis of mutual trust arising from the results of the self-certification and referencing process and with respect of the common principles in that regard. Furthermore, QA of the institutions and programmes, according to the European Standards and Guidelines by a competent QA authority, registered in the EQAR in the case of HE qualifications, is another valuable instrument used in assessment. Finally, the competent recognition authority should make use of other transparency tools such as Diploma Supplement and ECTS.

Only with the reliable set up of the recognition procedures based on quality assurance of foreign qualifications and with the use of the Bologna tools, the basis for the automatic recognition could be established.



\_ Biograd na Moru, Croatia, 27 June 2013

「SPEAKERS」

Quality assurance in HE and  
VET in the context of NQFs,  
EQF and QF-EHEA: promoting  
trust between the sectors?

## 4. SPEAKERS

### \_ Ana Tecilazić Goršić

/HR/  
Head of Sector for Development of Higher Education in the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports



Ana Tecilazić Goršić is currently Head of Sector for Development of Higher Education in the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports. She studied at the University of Zagreb, Croatia, at the Université Lumière Lyon 2, France and at the University of Sussex, UK. Her academic background encompasses fields of philosophy, languages and interdisciplinary European studies. Her fields of expertise and professional experience are higher education policy, lifelong learning, employability, quality assurance, recognition, qualifications frameworks and transparency. Ms Tecilazić Goršić is a national coordinator of the Working Group for removing obstacles for international learning mobility, member of the Committee responsible for preparing the CROQF Act and related sub legislation, secretary of the high level policy body developing national education, science and technology strategy, Deputy EU coordinator at the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports. She is also Croatian representative in different European bodies, groups and networks, such as member of the BFUG WGs, representative in the ET2020 Coordination Group, the EQF NCP network member, substitute member of the EQF Advisory Group and member of the Education Committee of the Council of the EU.

### \_ Angela Kee

/UK/  
Head of Research and Data UK NARIC



Angela graduated from the University of Leeds, majoring in Chinese (Modern). She is an experienced credential evaluator with a proven track record of successfully managing a multi-lingual team of regional specialists, maintaining internal quality procedures and ensuring compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention principles. In her current role Angela is responsible for overseeing the management of the UK NARIC Information Development Plan, managing the company's training provision and overseeing the development of innovative, made-to-measure member services and products.

### \_ Carita Blomqvist

/FI/  
Head of Unit "Recognition and International Comparability of Qualifications"



Carita Blomqvist works at the Finnish National Board of Education as the Head of Unit "Recognition and International Comparability of Qualifications". Carita Blomqvist has a doctoral degree in public administration. The topic of her doctoral thesis is "Open Method of Coordination in European Union Education Policy". She has a long experience in the field of recognition of professional qualifications (both as competent authority and as information point) and she is the vice-coordinator for the recognition of professional qualifications for Finland. She is in charge of the ENIC/NARIC center in Finland and she has a long experience in Bologna Process related activities. She was the President of the intergovernmental Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee in 2007-2013. During the last few years she has worked actively also in issues relating to national and European qualifications frameworks.

### \_ Colin Tück

/GER/  
Director of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)



Colin Tück is working as Director of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). He has been working for EQAR since October 2007, initially as Project Manager on behalf of its founding members (ENQA, ESU, EUA and EURASHE). Prior to joining EQAR he was involved in quality assurance-related topics as a member of the European Students' Union's (ESU, formerly ESIB) Bologna Process Committee. He was a member of the Executive Board of the National Union of Students in Germany (fzs) before his involvement in ESU.

## \_ Dana Stroie

/RO/  
Head of unit for training programmes and quality assurance at the Romanian National Centre for Initial VET Development



Dana Stroie is Head of unit for training programmes and quality assurance at the Romanian National Centre for Initial VET Development. She is responsible for the development and revision of methodologies for Quality Assurance in initial VET (TVET) and coordinates the implementation of Quality Assurance mechanisms in TVET schools. She is highly involved in the activity of the National Group for Quality Assurance (the Romanian National Reference Point). Ms Stroie joined the National Centre for TVET Development in 2004 as a Quality Assurance Expert. In this position she was involved in a range of developments regarding the National Quality Assurance Framework for TVET - the Romanian quality assurance framework for initial VET, based on CQAF. She contributed to the elaboration of the Manuals for self assessment and external monitoring in TVET, coordinated training sessions for school managers, Quality Assurance coordinators and inspectors and offered support to TVET schools in starting the QA implementation process. She was a member of ENQA-VET in the years 2008-2009.

## \_ Prof. Dr. Mile Dželalija

/HR/  
Professor of physics, University of Split, Faculty of Science



Prof. Dr. Mile Dželalija is a professor of physics at the University of Split. He got his PhD in Physics in 1995. Most of his research was done at the GSI in Darmstadt and CERN in Geneva. He represents Croatia in the EQF Advisory Group and National Correspondents for the QF-EHEA. He is a vice chair of the ESCO Cross-sectoral Reference Group. Since 2006 he is a president of the Governing Board of the Croatian Agency for Science and Higher Education. He has been leading the NQF development and implementation in Croatia, and as international expert in a number of other countries. He is also a member of the National Team of Bologna Experts. Besides teaching and research in physics, from an initial focus on higher education he has gradually expanded his focus to various areas of education policy. His fields of expertise and practical experience in education range from higher education, lifelong learning, employability, quality assurance, qualifications frameworks, recognition of prior learning, and transfer of research and innovation to business sector. Prof. Dželalija is an author of more than 300 of scientific reviewed publications. He has been leading and participating in several international projects.

## \_ Ružica Beljo Lučić

/HR/  
Assistant Minister



Ružica Beljo Lučić is currently Assistant Minister responsible for higher education. Since 2008 she is a Full Professor at the Faculty of Forestry, University of Zagreb where she has started her professional career as Junior Research Assistant in 1990. She was a Vice Dean for Academic Affairs from 2006 till 2008. Her fields of expertise include public policies on HE, quality assurance and qualifications frameworks. From 2011 till 2012 she was a Chairwoman of the Quality Management Committee at the University of Zagreb (after being a member from 2005) and a Member of the Accreditation Council of the Agency for Science and Higher Education. She actively participated in different projects concerning development of learning outcomes and e-learning at the University of Zagreb. She also participated in the IPA Project Further Development of the Croatian Qualifications Framework (CROQF) and was a member of different working groups supporting the Committee for the Development of Croatian Qualifications Framework and later the Committee for the Implementation of the Croatian Qualifications Framework. Currently she is president of the Committee responsible for preparing the CROQF Act (2013) and for sub legislation envisaged for further development and implementation of the CROQF. Ms Beljo Lučić also serves as EU coordinator at the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports.





\_ Biograd na Moru, Croatia, 27 June 2013

## 「SEMINAR CONCLUSIONS」

Quality assurance in HE and  
VET in the context of NQFs,  
EQF and QF-EHEA: promoting  
trust between the sectors?

## 5.1 Quality assurance in HE and VET in the context of NQFs, EQF and QF-EHEA: promoting trust between the sectors?

\_ Biograd na Moru, Croatia  
27 June 2013

### REPORT

The Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports organized the International Seminar entitled *Quality assurance in HE and VET in the context of NQFs, EQF and QF-EHEA: promoting trust between the sectors?* The Seminar took place on 27 June 2013 in Biograd na Moru, Croatia and hosted around 80 participants.

The Seminar was organized in order to further explore some of the Conclusions from the Irish Presidency Conference on Quality Assurance in Qualifications Frameworks (Dublin, March, 2013) with the objective of enhancing greater compatibility of relevant QA arrangements in HE and VET. The purpose of the Seminar was to examine QA capacities in HE and VET and how these interrelate with the development and implementation of qualifications frameworks. Furthermore, the issue of different QA arrangements for facilitating recognition of foreign qualifications, both in HE and VET, was discussed. The Seminar consisted of an introduction followed by three thematic sessions. The Agenda of the Seminar can be found in Annex I.

### INTRODUCTION

Opening statements were given by Ružica Beljo Lučić, Assistant Minister, Ministry of Science, Education and Sports and Leonardo Marušić, Vice Chancellor for mobility and projects, University of Zadar. Assistant Minister Beljo Lučić presented an overview of reform processes in the field of education and training in Croatia which began during the pre-accession period and which will continue as Croatia joins the EU. Croatia is developing a new Strategy on Education, Technology and Science which is in line with the EU strategic document “Education and Training 2020”. Improvement of quality culture was underlined as an important aspect in reform and particular emphasis was put on the facilitating role that qualifications frameworks can play in the recognition of foreign qualifications. Leonardo Marušić, Vice Chancellor described the establishment of quality assurance mechanisms at the Zadar University within the TEMPUS project which set

the basis for the current approach implemented at higher education institutions in Croatia.

**Key expert presentation** was given by Mile Dželalija, University of Split. The presentation gave an overview of priorities within the EU Strategy Europe 2020 and initiatives, processes and tools in the field of education and training that promote citizens’ mobility and facilitate their lifelong learning: Key Competences for LLL, EQAVET, ECVET, ECTS, QF-EHEA, EQF, ESCO, New Skills for New Jobs, EU Skills Panorama, Recognition of Prior Learning, Modernised PhDs etc. It was stressed that qualifications frameworks are often mechanisms for the implementation of all of the enlisted initiatives. The presentation firstly focused on the main idea and reasons for development of national and meta qualifications frameworks. As a practical example, the impact of the development and implementation of the NQF in Croatia was presented: involvement and effective communication among all relevant stakeholders; examples of good partnerships between E&T institutions and employers; an increasing number of individuals and institutions willing to reform the existing qualifications system; relevant QA Body in HE (Agency for Science and Higher Education) registered in EQAR; development of RPL system initiated. Secondly, the Common principles for quality assurance (Annex III of the EQF) were presented along with the conclusions from the Irish Presidency Conference on Quality Assurance in Qualifications Frameworks (Dublin, March, 2013) which underline that the Common principles for QA should be strengthened. Finally, the presentation concluded that the QFs are needed as they provide support for QA systems: QA is crucial in the qualifications systems but since in practice the QA often does not cover all aspects of the educational system, there is a need for QFs which would provide an overall support. In practical terms, it was explained that a QA agency can examine Phd programmes, but it cannot properly measure if the content corresponds to the knowledge acquired. QFs also provide better understanding and integrate stakeholders and partnerships and develop mutual trust based on clear criteria, procedures and principles. That is exactly why it is important to strengthen the Common principles for QA both in the field of HE as in the field of VET.

After the introductory part, the following comments were made:

- Currently, levels are often connected to the number of years of education. In practical terms, however, it is not always easy to define the level, as shown in the case of post-master studies. That is why the process of referencing to a common framework is necessary and while at the moment we are discussing formal procedures, we need to build trust to allow for this process to become automatic, especially when it comes to the process of recognition of foreign qualifications.
- Quality assurance agencies should be regularly evaluated and monitored.
- 20 European countries have up to now completed their referencing processes to the EQF. Croatia presented its interim report. The most important aspect of the Croatian Qualifications Framework will be the CROQF Register, where all aspects of QA will be developed. Entry into the Register will help institutions and qualifications to become recognized outside of the country.
- The idea of the EQF brand is being discussed as the second phase of the referencing is taking place: development of RPL; mutual trust; connection to ESCO.
- Programmes expressed in LOs should be linked to standards and standards are the basis for QA.
- Croatia is currently developing a new Act on recognition of foreign qualifications which will take into account new developments related to the EQF, QF-EHEA and the referencing and self-certification processes.

### FIRST THEMATIC SESSION: Quality assurance systems in HE and VET in relation to NQFs

The first thematic session consisted of two introductory presentations and two country example presentations:

- Colin Tück, European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)

“Introductory presentation: Safeguarding quality

assurance principles in HE”

- Dana Stroie, European Quality Assurance in VET, Working Group 1 (EQAVET)  
“Introductory presentation: EQAVET – supporting European quality assurance in VET”
- Tomas Egeltoft, Swedish Higher Education Authority  
“Country example: Implementation of learning outcomes in quality assurance of HE”
- Eduard Staudecker, Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Art and Culture  
“Country example: National Developments and Reforms in Austrian VET influenced by EQF”

**The first presentation** gave an outline of the European Standards and Guidelines for QA (ESG) and how they relate to the EQF common principles for QA (Annex III). While they broadly represent a very good match, the key differences can be found regarding the learning outcomes – where the EQF common principles are more clearly focused and in line with LO; as well as regarding the external QA – where the ESG define that it should be performed by an independent body which is not the case in the EQF common principles. However, the ESG are being revised and the new document where the focus on LO will be clearer will be finalized in 2015. The importance of EQAR was outlined in providing a reliable information point and assurance, enhancing trust and achieving recognition of all the assessed institutions. The presentation also outlined the importance of QA for the development of mutual trust and reminded how the recognition of QA and qualifications of different countries should be improved through the use of the Bologna tools. The Bucharest Communiqué invites countries to recognise QA decisions on joint/double degree programmes of EQAR registered agencies. Furthermore, recent trends at the EU level show that a lot of attention is being put on bringing all the initiatives and tools closer together. QA is certainly linked to QFs through referencing and self-certification processes and examples of already closely connected QA to QFs can be found in Germany, Denmark and UK. They form a sound basis for (automatic) recognition which can be seen in the recent example from the Flemish Community of Belgium where it was decided that EU degrees that have been referenced to the QF-EHEA and accredited by an EQAR registered QA agency will be automatically recognized.



**The second presentation** gave an overview of the development of QA in VET and an overview of the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET Recommendation 2009). The said recommendation is a reference instrument intended to help Member States promote and monitor continuous improvement of their VET systems based on common European references. It comprises a quality assurance and improvement cycle of planning, implementation, evaluation/assessment and review/revision of VET, supported by common quality criteria, indicative descriptors and indicators. It should be applied, on a voluntary basis, at the VET-system, VET-provider and qualification-awarding levels. The recommendation also states that extra emphasis should be placed on cooperation with HE as more work is needed to promote transparency and permeability as well as facilitate progression between VET and HE. If compared, the EQAVET and the ESG have similar common principles, in terms of explicit and strong European dimension and subsidiarity (voluntary approach by the Member States). They both put focus on stakeholders' needs, quality assurance mechanisms at providers' level and QA developments on a LLL perspective. They also share a common methodological approach at provider level, in terms of using self-assessment as a pillar of the QA system, involving stakeholders across the whole QA cycle, developing evidence based QA mechanisms, focusing on the QA of students' learning outcomes, emphasizing the role of quality improvement. Furthermore, the EU strategic document *Rethinking education* contains areas of mutual interest for VET and HE: promoting work-based learning, promoting partnerships between public and private institutions (education, business and research), promoting mobility, creating a European Area for Skills and Qualifications to promote a stronger convergence between the EU transparency and recognition tools and funding Education for Growth. Finally, the speaker announced *A Quality Assurance in VET and Higher Education* seminar which will be organised by EQAVET in conjunction with CEDEFOP in October 2013. The aim of the seminar is to identify the priorities and establish appropriate partnerships to support an on-going cooperation on QA issues between VET and HE in order to promote mobility and permeability.

**The third presentation** showed how the learning outcomes were implemented as tools for the external quality assurance of first and second cycle HE programmes in Sweden. The development of this process is closely connected to the establishment of the Swedish Qualifications Framework in 2007 as since then all qualifications are defined in terms of learning outcomes and workload. Accordingly, qualification descriptors with intended learning outcomes (ILOs) were introduced and later became the central element in the external part of QA procedure. The new QA procedure initiated in 2010 represented a shift in focus, from external quality assurance of the internal processes of the higher education institution to results of courses and study programmes. The National Agency assesses to what extent the students' achieved learning outcomes correspond to the intended learning outcomes laid down in the qualification descriptors specified in the Higher Education Ordinance. The National Qualifications Ordinance contains descriptors for each qualification and each descriptor includes 8-24 ILOs. Besides ILOs, all first and second cycle qualifications require independent projects by students. At the same time, the institutions should take full responsibility for the development and quality assurance of their activities. The new quality evaluation system is peer review based and takes place in a four year cycle (2011-2014). For each evaluation there is peer review team or a panel composed of experts, students and practitioners. Following the guidelines for the selection procedure established by the National Agency, the team makes a selection of the outcomes listed in the Higher Education Ordinance on which to base the subsequent assessment of the material. From four different assessment factors that are taken into account (students' independent projects, self-evaluations from HEIs, student experiences and interviews with the HEIs), the students' independent projects together with the learning outcomes accounted for in the self-evaluations provide the main basis for the overall assessments. As regards to independent student projects, it was stressed that the purpose is not to review grades of individual projects, given by the examiners and that a random selection of no more than 24, and a minimum of 5, independent projects from each study programme is made.

The panel report includes an assessment of each chosen ILO and an overall assessment for each study programme which is presented on a three-level scale: very high quality, high quality and inadequate quality. HEIs with 'very high quality' programmes receive additional funding, while those with 'inadequate quality' can continue and have one year for the improvement or they will no longer be able to perform the programme. Since 2011 up to now, about 800 out of 1500 programmes have been evaluated involving nearly 700 experts. The new model has led to an increased awareness of the national qualifications descriptors and to the improvements of HEIs internal quality assurance systems.

**The fourth presentation** illustrated the reforms in vocational education and training initiated by the EQF in Austria, as well as an overview of QA in VET, the implementation of ECVET and educational standards in VET. While the Bruges Communiqué (2010) promotes a vision of enhanced European cooperation in VET for the period 2011-2020, in practice the challenges are connected to heterogeneous VET systems in Europe, lack of transparency and trust as well as lack of comparability. Progress has been made in comparability through the use of learning arrangements between countries within the Leonardo and the Lifelong-learning programme, but efforts are still needed to achieve recognition of competences, systemic cooperation and definition of common goals. As regards to the EQF and NQF implementation in Austria, the strategic aim is to use it as a tool for translation between the numerous qualifications offered within the national qualifications system and develop criteria and procedures for validating non-formal qualifications and informally acquired learning outcomes. Educational standards in VET is a project that started in 2004 with the aim of developing and implementing a competence-based teaching and 'competence-catalogues' for assessments on the basis of educational standards in school-based VET as well as developing and implementing new curricula, deriving their educational targets directly from competence-models. The Austrian Initiative for Quality in VET (QIBB), QIBB has been gradually implemented since 2006 at all VET school types throughout Austria. Within QIBB, evaluation is regularly carried out and data is systematically collected

for all groups of persons affected by educational and administrative processes. Qualitative and quantitative indicators are used to check whether the intended objectives have been achieved. QIBB started with internal self-evaluation on a voluntary basis. A range of evaluation instruments, into which tools for standardised data evaluation are integrated, are available via an internet platform for all schools. A further step was made in 2009 with the introduction of an external evaluation tool within QIBB: Peer Review in QIBB. Finally, when it comes to ECVET, the Recommendation does not state clearly how the implementation should be done, it is left to countries to decide. From Austria's point of view, the implementation of ECVET should evaluate learning outcomes (potentially through the use of credit points) and transfer the LO and competences; be compatible and consistent with ECTS; be applicable not only to transnational mobility activities; avoid extra bureaucratic effort for stakeholders and create and use synergies with other European tools and instruments (EQAR, EQAVET).

The following questions and comments were made after the first thematic session:

- The recent example of recognition of foreign qualifications from the Flemish Community of Belgium underlines the importance of international cooperation through initiatives such as EQAR. It also shows that the EQF common principles are equally important in the process since the second condition for the automatic recognition in this example is related to the referencing process of the qualifications frameworks.
- In VET there are still no immediate plans for establishing a register similar to EQAR. EQAVET recommendation states that there should be external evaluation, but it is not so strictly defined as in EQAR.
- Two different blocks of countries can be identified in the EU with regards to main differences in VET: those with developed work-based training and those with low or none work-based training. Because of these differences it will not be easy to establish a coherent system of validation of VET qualifications.
- In Sweden, a large number of experts were interested in participating in the quality evaluation panels

because they recognized the importance of the process and accepted the responsibility that comes with autonomy. The learning outcomes and their descriptors are defined in generic terms, the panel of experts defines the criteria and the levels.

## SECOND THEMATIC SESSION: Quality assurance arrangements for facilitating recognition of foreign qualifications

The second thematic session started with an introductory presentation which was followed by two country example presentations:

- Carita Blomqvist, Finnish National Board of Education  
“Introductory presentation: Qualifications frameworks facilitating recognition”
- Angela Kee, UK NARIC  
“Country example: Recognition of academic, vocational, and professional qualifications – challenges in implementing the policy and procedures”
- Ana Tecilazić Goršić, Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports  
“Country example: Quality assurance in recognition of foreign qualifications”

**The first presentation** was structured around the use of qualifications frameworks in the recognition process with an overview of the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (access qualifications, periods of study and final qualifications issued in signatory states; applicants entitled to fair assessment of their qualifications within reasonable time limit; transparent, coherent, reliable procedures and criteria used in the assessment; recognize unless substantial differences; possibility to appeal; burden of proof upon the host country/body making recognition decisions). The Convention contains different subsidiary texts that resulted from the furthering of cooperation in education and training at the European level and the most recent recommendation is related to recognition and qualifications framework. It resulted from the

developments on national and European level in terms of European and National QFs, learning outcomes, life-long learning, recognition of prior learning and self-certification and referencing processes. It is considered that more stakeholder involvement and co-operation between national and European stakeholders is needed (role of ENIC/NARIC offices) and such recommendation would benefit individual learners as both QFs and recognition are supposed to help individuals understand qualifications and move within and between systems. In short, the recommendation states that national QFs facilitate recognition especially when they have been linked in a transparent and comparative way – through self-certification and referencing – to the QF-EHEA/EQF-LLL. While the existence of a national QF alone does not lead to “automatic recognition”, the positioning of qualifications within the national QF of the awarding country and their relation to one or more overarching frameworks gives important information to facilitate the recognition processes. QFs should be used when considering the key elements in recognition: level, learning outcomes, quality, workload and profile. As regards quality, the recommendation states that as a general rule there is no need for the recognition authority to investigate the quality of the qualification if a NQF has been self-certified or referenced, since there is an assumption that the individual qualifications included in the framework by the competent authority are quality assured. The presentation concluded with the remark that QFs will not guarantee automatic recognition, but will facilitate recognition by improving transparency, increasing information, helping to make judgements more accurate and helping to see similarities.

**The second presentation** outlined the recognition of academic, vocational and professional in UK which is performed by the UK NARIC office. UK NARIC has a wide range of databases with information on qualifications from 190 countries. A large number of those do not have developed QFs.

The evaluation elements used in the recognition process are: the status of the awarding institution, entrance/admission requirements, duration of study, course content and structure, examination methods, research elements/thesis, title of final qualification,

rights attached, learning outcomes. The European Area of Recognition manual which is a practical tool for credential evaluation that provides recommendations on a number of key recognition topics such as accreditation, learning outcomes and transparency is used in the process. The recognition process ends with the issuance of Statement of Comparability. A 15 level NARIC Band Framework with level descriptors of what an individual is able to do was created to facilitate this process since the evaluation criteria accommodate different educational systems in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The Band Framework was designed to ensure accuracy and consistency of comparability statements and to represent all different types of international qualification and provide meaningful linkages to the most similar UK awards. Common recognition issues are related to joint degrees, transnational education and distance education.

**The third presentation** outlined the quality assurance in recognition of foreign qualifications in Croatia. An overview of the strategic documents which define how internationalization contributes to quality higher education was given. The number of recognised qualifications in Croatia has been increasing and ever since Croatia joined the Lifelong learning programme, the number of periods of study abroad has also been rising. When it comes to comparison of quality assurance of national and foreign programmes and institutions abroad it is clear that the national rules are very strict while for the foreign qualifications the only conditions are whether the issuing institution and the qualification have been accredited. Croatia is currently developing a new legislative framework for the recognition of foreign qualifications which will contain clear criteria in terms of level, volume, quality and profile (learning outcomes) and be based on quality assurance and national qualifications frameworks. Professional bodies will be included in the recognition of professional qualifications. The new legislative framework will be in line with the ‘Bologna triangle’ where the learning outcomes are situated in the middle between recognition, national QF and QA. The future challenges so far identified relate to further developing NQFs based on learning outcomes, referencing and self-certifying NQFs to the meta-frameworks, reviewing national legislation related

to recognition procedures (LOs – based) and further building LOs QA system.

Comments made after the second thematic session were the following:

- Although quality assurance in HE is implemented quite well, further work is needed as national QFs are at different stages of development across countries.
- In VET, further support and work is needed, especially when it comes to implementation of ECVET points which would facilitate the recognition process. However, all other aspects will still have to be taken into account. There are still large differences among countries, especially when it comes to progression to HE from VET. The component of work-based training should also be taken better into account.

# 5.2 SEMINAR CONCLUSIONS

Biograd na Moru, Croatia  
27 June 2013

1. In order to achieve a common goal of bringing the worlds of Higher Education (HE) and Vocational Education and Training (VET) closer together, it is important to work further on implementation of Common Principles for Quality Assurance (taking into account the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) criteria and procedures) that would finally lead to more transparency, better reliability and trust in qualifications that are described in terms of learning outcomes and quality assured by the use of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) as one of the QA supporting tools.

2. Since referencing and self-certification of the NQFs to the EQF and to the QF-EHEA, with particular emphasis on fulfilment of all criteria, procedures and principles, provide the basis for mutual trust, it is important that the countries continue and intensify their work on further development and implementation of their NQFs and on self-certification and referencing in particular.

3. The implementation of Common principles of QA such as found in Annexe III to the EQF Recommendation should be intensified. In HE, the independent review of QA bodies and European register EQAR are already being implemented while in VET the review of QA bodies needs to be further discussed.

4. The collaboration between HE and VET providers and policy makers should be additionally supported to allow for their mutually comprehensible QA systems which would additionally contribute to building trust among the sectors.

5. Since ensuring quality is an on-going process that often needs adjustments to current circumstances, QA processes and standards should reflect the need for both accountability in terms of minimal standards and improvement of quality.
6. Although the European Standards and Guidelines for QA in HE (ESG) and the Common principles for QA in the EQF differ in learning outcomes approach in a way that it is more supported by the EQF, and in the level of independence of QA bodies that is strongly emphasised by the ESG, they represent substantially coherent basis for further development of QA.

7. The implementation of the EQAVET recommendation at the national level and its further development, including networking of QA National Reference Points at the EU level should additionally be supported with the purpose of generating **culture of quality throughout the EU thus contributing to an increased trust in VET qualifications.**

8. The QA processes and standards should equally take into account the assessment of “Fit for purpose” aspect (e.g. employability, active citizenship).

9. Some countries already use NQFs as a support tool for QA. The implementation of such examples should be widespread as good practice among different stakeholders across Europe.

10. The use of Recommendation on the use of Qualifications Frameworks in the recognition of foreign qualifications which was adopted as a subsidiary text to the Lisbon Recognition Convention at the LRC Committee meeting in Split in June 2013 is highly recommended. This document, along with other emerging policy papers, promotes the use of qualifications frameworks in facilitating the recognition procedures that could eventually lead to automatic recognition of foreign qualifications. Moreover, there are already emerging examples that could pave the path to automatic recognition.

11. In order to ensure proper recognition of foreign qualifications, the main elements to be taken into account should be learning outcomes, level workload,
- quality and profile which stresses the role of QFs in this process. Although qualifications frameworks give only limited amount of information on profile for recognition purposes, they allow for simpler assessment of the other four elements.

12. The use of ECVET should be additionally supported. However, there are different opinions among stakeholders whether the use of ECVET should become similar to the idea of usage of ECTS and this topic needs to be further discussed.

5.3 AGENDA

\_ Registration: 8:30 – 9:00  
Moderator: Daria Arlavi

9:00 – 9:30	<b>Welcome and opening statements</b> Ružica Beljo Lučić (Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports) Leonardo Marušić (University of Zadar)
9:30 – 10:30	<b>Introduction to the Seminar – key expert presentation</b> Mile Dželalija (University of Split)  <b>Discussion</b>
10:30 – 11:00	<b>Coffee break</b>
11:00 – 13:00	<b>Session 1: Quality assurance systems in HE and VET in relation to NQFs</b>  <b>Introductory presentation: Safeguarding quality assurance principles in HE</b> Colin Tück (EQAR)  <b>Introductory presentation: EQAVET – supporting European quality assurance in VET</b> Dana Stroie (EQAVET WG 1)  <b>Country example: Implementation of learning outcomes in quality assurance of HE</b> Tomas Egeltoft (Swedish Higher Education Authority)  <b>Country example: National Developments and Reforms in Austrian VET influenced by EQF</b> Eduard Staudecke (Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Art and Culture)  <b>Discussion</b>
13:00 – 14:00	<b>Lunch break</b>

14:00 – 16:00	<b>Session 2: Quality assurance arrangements for facilitating recognition of foreign qualifications</b>  <b>Introductory presentation: Qualifications frameworks facilitating recognition</b> Carita Blomqvist (Finnish National Board of Education)  <b>Country example: Recognition of academic, vocational and professional qualifications – challenges in implementing the policy and procedures</b> Angela Kee (UK NARIC)  <b>Country example: Quality assurance in recognition of foreign qualifications</b> Ana Tecilazić Goršić (Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports)  <b>Discussion</b>
16:00 – 16:30	<b>Coffee break</b>
16:30 – 17:00	<b>Conclusions and Seminar close</b> (Mile Dželalija, University of Split)



\_ Biograd na Moru, Croatia, 27 June 2013

## 「ANNEX A」

Quality assurance in HE and  
VET in the context of NQFs,  
EQF and QF-EHEA: promoting  
trust between the sectors?



## 6.1 Subsidiary text to the convention: “Recommendation on the use of Qualifications frameworks in the Recognition of foreign Qualifications”

### Preamble

The Committee of the Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region<sup>18</sup>,

Considering that the aim of the Council of Europe and UNESCO is to achieve greater unity between their members, and that this aim can be pursued notably by common action in cultural matters and by supporting the reforms of higher education;

Having regard to the Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region;

Having regard to the European Cultural Convention; Having regard to the Declaration of the European Ministers of Education in Bologna on 19 June 1999, and the subsequent communiqués of the Ministerial meetings within the Bologna Process, especially their reference to qualifications frameworks and the role that they (subnational, national and overarching) could play in the reforms of higher education in Europe as well as in countries which belong to the UNESCO European Region and which although not involved in the process, have or intend to develop a National Qualifications Framework;

Having regard to the subsidiary texts adopted under the Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region: the UNESCO/Council of Europe Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education, the Revised Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications, and the Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees;

Having regard to the Diploma Supplement which facilitates the recognition of qualifications by indicating the NQF, EQF and EHEA QF level, developed jointly by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO;

Having regard to the European Union’s Europass<sup>19</sup> as well as to developments with the use of credit systems, in particular the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS);

Having regard to other similar transparency tools existing in countries party to the Convention;

Having regard to the work undertaken towards improving the recognition of qualifications concerning higher education by the Council of Europe/UNESCO European Network of National Information Centres (ENIC<sup>20</sup>) on academic recognition and mobility and the national information centres;

Considering that the Council of Europe and UNESCO have always encouraged academic mobility as a means for better understanding of the various cultures and languages, and without any form of racial, religious, political or sexual discrimination;

Considering that studying or working in a foreign country is likely to contribute to an individual’s cultural and academic enrichment, as well as to improve the individual’s career prospects;

Considering the developments of qualifications frameworks at subnational, national and regional levels (including for example the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF-LLL));

Considering that National Qualifications Frameworks in the European Higher Education Area are often self-certified and referenced against the QF-EHEA and EQF-LLL;

<sup>18</sup> In this Recommendation, the Convention will be referred to as “the Lisbon Recognition Convention”.

<sup>19</sup> Decision 2241/2004/EC (15 December 2004) of the European Parliament and of the Council - on a single Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences (Europass).

<sup>20</sup> Some ENIC centres are also NARIC centres and all cooperate through the ENIC/NARIC Networks

Considering that there are parties to the Lisbon Recognition Convention that are not committed to the QF-EHEA and/or the EQF-LLL, but where qualifications frameworks also exist or may be developed;

Considering that learning outcomes provide the basis on which qualifications frameworks and recognition practices are built;

Considering that qualifications frameworks include and/or refer to arrangements for ensuring the quality of programmes and of the institutions issuing the qualifications included in the frameworks;

Considering that the recognition of qualifications is an essential precondition for both academic and professional mobility, as well as for building knowledge based societies;

Recommends the governments of States party to the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region:

to take into account, in the establishment of their recognition policies, the principles outlined in the appendix hereto which forms part of this Recommendation; to draw these principles to the attention of the competent bodies concerned; to promote the implementation of these principles by government agencies, local and regional authorities within their country, and by higher education institutions; to ensure that this Recommendation is distributed as widely as possible among all stakeholders concerned with the recognition of qualifications concerning higher education;

Invites the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and the Director-General of UNESCO, as appropriate, to transmit this Recommendation to the governments of those States which have been invited to the Diplomatic Conference entrusted with the adoption of the Lisbon Recognition Convention but which have not become parties to that Convention.

## APPENDIX: APPENDIX TO THE RECOMMENDATION ON THE USE OF QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS IN THE RECOGNITION OF FOREIGN QUALIFICATIONS

### I. Definitions

#### 1. General Terms:

- (a) The general terms used throughout the present Recommendation are the same as those understood in the Lisbon Recognition Convention and referenced in the definition of terms (Section I) of the Convention.

#### 2. Terminology specific to the present Recommendation:

- (a) “National Qualifications Framework(s) (NQFs)” refers to qualifications frameworks developed at the national or sub-national level and specific to a country’s structure of education and training;
- (b) “Overarching frameworks” refers to regional frameworks to which NQFs are related (for example the QF-EHEA and EQF-LLL);
- (c) “Qualifications frameworks” refers in general terms to both NQFs and overarching frameworks.

### II. Scope and General Considerations

1. The Recommendation focuses on the use of qualifications frameworks as important information and transparency tools in the recognition of higher education qualifications and qualifications giving access to higher education.

2. The Recommendation takes account of the fact that, from a lifelong learning perspective, qualifications frameworks can also facilitate the recognition of prior learning, since qualifications frameworks describe qualifications in terms of learning outcomes independently from learning paths. It also takes account of the fact that qualifications frameworks can be used to

facilitate access to the labour market.

3. The Recommendation demonstrates ways in which qualifications frameworks may be helpful in establishing similarities between foreign qualifications and relevant qualifications within the education system in which recognition is sought, and whether or not there are substantial differences between qualifications.

4. The fact that not all countries, or indeed all signatories to the Lisbon Recognition Convention, have national qualifications frameworks should not be an impediment to recognizing qualifications from such countries. Likewise many older qualifications may not be placed in a qualifications framework even if the country in question has now developed one.

5. National Qualifications Frameworks facilitate recognition especially when they have been linked in a transparent and comparative way – through self-certification and referencing – to the overarching frameworks, such as QF-EHEA and EQF-LLL.

6. While the existence of a NQF alone does not lead to “automatic recognition”, the positioning of qualifications within the NQF of the awarding country and their relation to one or more overarching frameworks gives important information to facilitate the recognition processes.

### III. Recommendations

1. The competent recognition authorities, and the ENIC Network should develop a common understanding on how to use national, European or other overarching qualifications frameworks for the purpose of facilitating the fair recognition of qualifications and should identify the opportunities and challenges they present.

2. Qualifications frameworks should be used to make it easier for competent recognition authorities to assess foreign qualifications.

3. Qualifications frameworks should be used while considering the five key elements in recognition: level, learning outcomes, quality, workload and profile.

However, qualifications frameworks provide limited information to support the recognition process when it comes to the profile of a qualification.

4. The following principles should apply to assure the effective use of qualifications frameworks in recognition practice:

#### (a) Level

1. If a National Qualifications Framework has been self-certified or referenced, there is, as a general rule, no need for the competent recognition authority to investigate the level of qualifications further;
2. In the case that qualifications have been referenced/self-certified towards the same level in overarching frameworks, they should be seen as broadly compatible;
3. When level discrepancies occur, qualification specific information including the Diploma Supplement or other documents should be used. In these cases, the formal rights the qualification in the awarding country should be taken into account.

#### (b) Learning outcomes

1. i. The learning outcomes of National Qualifications Frameworks and of overarching qualifications frameworks are generic and provide a reference point for recognition;
2. ii. In cases where the learning outcomes provided by the qualifications frameworks are insufficient for recognition purposes, the more detailed descriptions of learning outcomes provided by institutions should be used. The description of learning outcomes in the Diploma Supplement or other documents is useful for recognition purposes.

#### (c) Quality

1. i. A transparent link between recognition, qualifications frameworks and quality assurance should be established;

2. ii. If a National Qualifications Framework has been self-certified or referenced, there is an assumption that the individual qualifications included in the framework by the competent authority are quality assured. Therefore as a general rule there is no need for the recognition authority to investigate the quality of the qualification.

#### (d) Workload

While recognising that qualifications should as far as possible be assessed on the basis of learning outcomes, competent recognition authorities may also be guided in their assessment by the workload learners are assumed to require in order to obtain the given qualification. This is normally expressed as credits and indicates the typical workload expected to achieve the learning outcomes associated with a qualification.



# 6.2 Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area

## Foreword

In the Berlin communiqué of 19 September 2003 the Ministers of the Bologna Process signatory states invited the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) ‘through its members, in cooperation with the EUA, EURASHE, and ESIB’, to develop ‘an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance’ and 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 Bologna Follow-Up Group to Ministers in 2005’. The Ministers also asked ENQA to take due account ‘of the expertise of other quality assurance associations and networks’.

This report forms the response to this mandate and comes with the endorsement of all the organisations named in that section of the communiqué. The achievement of such a joint understanding is a tribute to the spirit of co-operation and mutual respect that has characterised the discussions between all the players involved. I would therefore like to extend my thanks to the EUA, EURASHE and ESIB together with the ENQA member agencies for their constructive and most valuable input to the process.

This report is directed at the European Ministers of Education. However, we expect the report to achieve a wider circulation among those with an interest in quality assurance in higher education. These readers will hopefully find the report useful and inspirational.

It must be emphasised that the report is no more than a first step in what is likely to be a long and possibly arduous route to the establishment of a widely shared set of underpinning values, expectations and good practice in relation to quality and its assurance, by institutions and agencies across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

What has been set in motion by the Berlin mandate will need to be developed further if it is to provide the fully functioning European dimension of quality assurance for the EHEA. If this can be accomplished, then many of the ambitions of the Bologna Process will also be achieved.

All the participants in the work to date look forward to contributing to the success of that endeavour.

Christian Thune President of ENQA February 2005

## Executive summary

This report has been drafted by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)<sup>21</sup>, through its members, in consultation and co-operation with the EUA, ESIB and EURASHE and in discussion with various relevant networks. It forms the response to the twin mandates given to ENQA in the Berlin communiqué of September 2003 to develop ‘an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance’ and ‘to explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer review system for quality assurance<sup>22</sup> and/or accreditation agencies or bodies’.

The report consists of four chapters. After the introductory chapter on context, aims and principles, there follow chapters on standards and guidelines for quality assurance; a peer review system for quality assurance agencies; and future perspectives and challenges.

The main results and recommendations of the report are:

- There will be European standards for internal and external quality assurance, and for external quality assurance agencies.
- European quality assurance agencies will be expected to submit themselves to a cyclical review within five years.
- There will be an emphasis on subsidiarity, with reviews being undertaken nationally where possible.
- A European register of quality assurance agencies will be produced.
- A European Register Committee will act as a gatekeeper for the inclusion of agencies in the register.
- A European Consultative Forum for Quality Assurance in Higher Education will be established.

When the recommendations are implemented:

- The consistency of quality assurance across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) will be improved by the use of agreed standards and guidelines.
- Higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies across the EHEA will be able to use common reference points for quality assurance.
- The register will make it easier to identify professional and credible agencies.
- Procedures for the recognition of qualifications will be strengthened.
- The credibility of the work of quality assurance agencies will be enhanced.
- The exchange of viewpoints and experiences amongst agencies and other key stakeholders (including higher education institutions, students and labour market representatives) will be enhanced through the work of the European Consultative Forum for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.
- The mutual trust among institutions and agencies will grow.
- The move toward mutual recognition will be assisted.

## Summary list of European standards for quality assurance

This summary list of European standards for quality assurance in higher education is drawn from Chapter 2 of the report and is placed here for ease of reference. It omits the accompanying guidelines. The standards are in three parts covering internal quality assurance of higher education institutions, external quality assurance of higher education, and quality assurance of external quality assurance agencies.

### Part 1: European standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance within higher education institutions

- 1.1 **Policy and procedures for quality assurance:** Institutions should have a policy and associated procedures for the assurance of the quality and standards of their programmes and awards. They should also commit themselves explicitly to the development of a culture which recognises the importance of quality, and quality assurance, in their work. To achieve this, institutions should develop and implement a strategy for the continuous enhancement of quality. The strategy, policy and procedures should have a formal status and be publicly available. They should also include a role for students and other stakeholders.
- 1.2 **Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards:** Institutions should have formal mechanisms for the approval, periodic review and monitoring of their programmes and awards.
- 1.3 **Assessment of students:** Students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied consistently.
- 1.4 **Quality assurance of teaching staff:** Institutions should have ways of satisfying themselves that staff involved with the teaching of students are qualified and competent to do so. They should be available to those undertaking external reviews, and commented upon in reports.

<sup>21</sup> ENQA’s General Assembly confirmed on 4 November 2004 the change of the former European Network into the European Association.

<sup>22</sup> The term “quality assurance” in this report includes processes such as evaluation, accreditation and audit.

- 1.5 **Learning resources and student support:**  
Institutions should ensure that the resources available for the support of student learning are adequate and appropriate for each programme offered.
- 1.6 **Information systems:**  
Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes of study and other activities.
- 1.7 **Public information:**  
Institutions should regularly publish up to date, impartial and objective information, both quantitative and qualitative, about the programmes and awards they are offering.

## Part 2: European standards for the external quality assurance of higher education

- 2.1 **Use of internal quality assurance procedures:**  
External quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines.
- 2.2 **Development of external quality assurance processes:**  
The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.
- 2.3 **Criteria for decisions:**  
Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently.
- 2.4 **Processes fit for purpose:**  
All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.

- 2.5 **Reporting:**  
Reports should be published and should be written in a style, which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find.
- 2.6 **Follow-up procedures:**  
Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently.
- 2.7 **Periodic reviews:**  
External quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance.
- 2.8 **System-wide analyses:**  
Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments etc.

## Part 3: European standards for external quality assurance agencies

- 3.1 **Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education:**  
The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines.
- 3.2 **Official status:**  
Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.

- 3.3 **Activities:**  
Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis.
- 3.4 **Resources:**  
Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures.
- 3.5 **Mission statement:**  
Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.
- 3.6 **Independence:**  
Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.
- 3.7 **External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies:**  
The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available. These processes will normally be expected to include:
- a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process;
  - an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency;
  - publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes;
  - a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.

- 3.8 **Accountability procedures:**  
Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.

## 1. CONTEXT, AIMS AND PRINCIPLES

In the Berlin communiqué of 19 September 2003 the Ministers of the Bologna Process signatory states invited ENQA ‘through its members, in cooperation with the EUA, EURASHE, and ESIB’, to develop ‘an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance’ and 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 Bologna Follow-Up Group to Ministers in 2005’. The Ministers also asked ENQA to take due account ‘of the expertise of other quality assurance associations and networks’.

ENQA welcomed this opportunity to make a major contribution to the development of the European dimension in quality assurance and, thereby, to further the aims of the Bologna Process.

The work has involved many different organisations and interest groups. First, ENQA members have been extensively involved in the process. Members have participated in working groups, and draft reports have been important elements in the agenda of the ENQA General Assemblies in June and November 2004. Secondly, the European University Association (EUA), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB) and the European Commission have participated through regular meetings in the ‘E4 Group’. Thirdly, the contacts with and contributions from other networks, such as the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) and the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies (CEE Network), have been particularly valuable in the drafting process. Finally, ENQA and its partners have made good use of their individual international contacts and experiences and in this way ensured that relevant international perspectives were brought into the process. Quality assurance in higher education is by no means only a European concern. All over the world there is an increasing interest in quality and standards, reflecting both the rapid growth of higher education and its cost to the public and the private purse. Accordingly,

if Europe is to achieve its aspiration to be the most dynamic and knowledge-based economy in the world (Lisbon Strategy), then European higher education will need to demonstrate that it takes the quality of its programmes and awards seriously and is willing to put into place the means of assuring and demonstrating that quality. The initiatives and demands, which are springing up both inside and outside Europe in the face of this internationalisation of higher education, demand a response. The commitment of all those involved in the production of these proposals augurs well for the fulfilment of a truly European dimension to quality assurance with which to reinforce the attractiveness of the EHEA’s higher education offering.

The proposals contained in this report are underpinned by a number of principles which are described in more detail in the two chapters which cover the two parts of the Berlin mandate. However, some fundamental principles should permeate the whole work:

- the interests of students as well as employers and the society more generally in good quality higher education;
- the central importance of institutional autonomy, tempered by a recognition that this brings with it heavy responsibilities;
- the need for external quality assurance to be fit for its purpose and to place only an appropriate and necessary burden on institutions for the achievement of its objectives.

The EHEA with its 40 states 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. In the light of this diversity and variety, generally acknowledged as being one of the glories of Europe, the report sets 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. It does this because it believes that this approach is more likely to lead to broad acceptance in the first instance and because it will provide a more

robust basis for the coming together of the different higher education communities across the EHEA. The generic standards ought to find a general resonance at the national<sup>23</sup> level of most signatory states. However, one consequence of the generic principle is that the standards and guidelines focus more on what should be done than how they should be achieved. Thus, the report does include procedural matters, but it has given a priority to standards and guidelines, especially in Chapter 2.

Finally, it must be emphasised that reaching agreement for this report is not the same thing as fulfilling the Bologna goal of a quality assurance dimension for the EHEA. Ahead lies more work to implement the recommendations of the report and secure the implied quality culture among both the higher education institutions and the external quality assurance agencies.

<sup>23</sup> Throughout the report, the term “national” also includes the regional context with regard to quality assurance agencies, national contexts and authorities etc.

## 2. EUROPEAN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

The Ministers’ mandate to develop ‘an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance’ raised a number of important questions. ‘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. Similarly, the word ‘standards’ is employed in a variety of ways across Europe, ranging from statements of narrowly defined regulatory requirements to more generalised descriptions of good practice. The words also have very different meanings in the local contexts of national higher education systems.

Moreover, the drafting process itself has made evident that, within the quality assurance community itself, there are some quite fundamental differences of view of the appropriate relationship that should be established between higher education institutions and their external evaluators. Some, mainly from agencies which accredit programmes or institutions, take the view that external quality assurance is essentially a matter of ‘consumer protection’, requiring a clear distance to be established between the quality assurance agency and the higher education institutions whose work they assess, while other agencies see the principal purpose of external quality assurance to be the provision of advice and guidance in pursuit of improvements in the standards and quality of programmes of study and associated qualifications. In the latter case a close relationship between the evaluators and the evaluated is a requirement. Yet others wish to adopt a position somewhere between the two, seeking to balance accountability and improvement.

Nor is it just the quality assurance agencies that have different views on these matters. The interests of the higher education institutions and student representative bodies are not always the same, the former seeking a high level of autonomy with a minimum of external regulation or evaluation (and that at the level of the whole institution), the latter wanting institutions to be publicly accountable through frequent inspection at the

level of the programme or qualification. Finally, the standards and guidelines relate only to the three cycles of higher education described in the Bologna Declaration and are not intended to cover the area of research or general institutional management.

#### BACKGROUND OF THE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

This section of the report contains a set of proposed standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the EHEA. The standards and guidelines are designed to be applicable to all higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies in Europe, irrespective of their structure, function and size, and the national system in which they are located. As mentioned earlier, it has not been considered appropriate to include detailed 'procedures' in the recommendations of this chapter of the report, since institutional and agency procedures are an important part of their autonomy. It will be for the institutions and agencies themselves, co-operating within their individual contexts, to decide the procedural consequences of adopting the standards contained in this report.

As their starting point, the standards and guidelines endorse the spirit of the 'July 2003 Graz Declaration' of the European University Association (EUA) which states that 'the purpose of a European dimension to quality assurance is to promote mutual trust and improve transparency while respecting the diversity of national contexts and subject areas'. Consonant with the Graz declaration, the standards and guidelines contained in this report recognise the primacy of national systems of higher education, the importance of institutional and agency autonomy within those national systems, and the particular requirements of different academic subjects. In addition, the standards and guidelines owe much to the experience gained during the ENQA-coordinated pilot project 'Transnational European Evaluation Project' (TEEP), which investigated, in three disciplines, the operational implications of a European transnational quality evaluation process.

The standards and guidelines also take into account the quality convergence study published by ENQA in March 2005, which examined the reasons for differences

between different national approaches to external quality assurance and constraints on their convergence. Further, they reflect the statement of Ministers in the Berlin communiqué that 'consistent with the principle of institutional autonomy, the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself and this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework'. In these standards and guidelines, therefore, an appropriate balance has been sought between the creation and development of internal quality cultures, and the role which external quality assurance procedures may play.

In addition, the standards and guidelines have also benefited particularly from the 'Code of Good Practice' published in December 2004 by the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) and other perspectives included in ESIB's 'Statement on agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines at a European level' (April 2004) and 'Statement on peer review of quality assurance and accreditation agencies' (April 2004), EUA's 'QA policy position in the context of the Berlin Communiqué' (April 2004) and the EURASHE 'Policy Statement on the Bologna Process' (June 2004). Finally, an international perspective has been included by comparing the standards on external quality assurance with the "Guidelines for good practice" being implemented by the international network INQAAHE.

#### Introduction to Parts 1 and 2: European standards and guidelines for internal and external quality assurance of higher education

The standards and guidelines for internal and external quality assurance, which follow, have been developed for the use of higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies working in the EHEA, covering key areas relating to quality and standards.

The purpose of these standards and guidelines is to provide a source of assistance and guidance to both higher education institutions in developing their own quality assurance systems and agencies undertaking external quality assurance, as well as to contribute to a common frame of reference, which can be

used by institutions and agencies alike. It is not the intention that these standards and guidelines should dictate practice or be interpreted as prescriptive or unchangeable.

In some countries of the EHEA the ministry of education or an equivalent organisation has the responsibility for some of the areas covered by the standards and guidelines. Where this is the case, that ministry or organisation should ensure that appropriate quality assurance mechanisms are in place and subject to independent reviews.

#### BASIC PRINCIPLES

The standards and guidelines are based on a number of basic principles about quality assurance, both internal in and external to higher education in the EHEA. These include:

- providers of higher education have the primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance;
- the interests of society in the quality and standards of higher education need to be safeguarded;
- the quality of academic programmes need to be developed and improved for students and other beneficiaries of higher education across the EHEA;
- there need to be efficient and effective organisational structures within which those academic programmes can be provided and supported;
- transparency and the use of external expertise in quality assurance processes are important;
- there should be encouragement of a culture of quality within higher education institutions;
- processes should be developed through which higher education institutions can demonstrate their accountability, including accountability for the investment of public and private money;
- quality assurance for accountability purposes is fully compatible with quality assurance for enhancement purposes;
- institutions should be able to demonstrate their quality at home and internationally;
- processes used should not stifle diversity and innovation.

#### PURPOSES OF THE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

The purposes of the standards and guidelines are:

- to improve the education available to students in higher education institutions in the EHEA;
- to assist higher education institutions in managing and enhancing their quality and, thereby, to help to justify their institutional autonomy;
- to form a background for quality assurance agencies in their work;
- to make external quality assurance more transparent and simpler to understand for everybody involved.

#### OBJECTIVES OF THE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

The objectives of the standards and guidelines are:

- to encourage the development of higher education institutions which foster vibrant intellectual and educational achievement;
- to provide a source of assistance and guidance to higher education institutions and other relevant agencies in developing their own culture of quality assurance;
- to inform and raise the expectations of higher education institutions, students, employers and other stakeholders about the processes and outcomes of higher education;
- to contribute to a common frame of reference for the provision of higher education and the assurance of quality within the EHEA.

#### EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

The standards and guidelines proposed in this report envisage an important role for external quality assurance. The form of this varies from system to system and can include institutional evaluations of different types; subject or programme evaluations; accreditation at subject, programme and institutional levels; and combinations of these. Such external evaluations largely depend for their full effectiveness on there being an explicit internal quality assurance strategy, with specific objectives, and on the use, within institutions, of mechanisms and methods aimed at achieving those objectives.

- Quality assurance can be undertaken by external agencies for a number of purposes, including:
- safeguarding of national academic standards for higher education;
  - accreditation of programmes and/or institutions;
  - user protection;
  - public provision of independently-verified information (quantitative and qualitative) about programmes or institutions;
  - improvement and enhancement of quality.

The activities of European quality assurance agencies will reflect the legal, social and cultural requirements of the jurisdictions and environments in which they operate. European standards relating to the quality assurance of quality assurance agencies themselves are contained in Part 3 of this chapter.

The processes carried out by quality assurance agencies will properly depend upon their purposes and the outcomes they are intended to achieve. The procedures adopted by those agencies that are concerned to emphasise principally the enhancement of quality may be quite different from those whose function is first to provide strong ‘consumer protection’. The standards that follow reflect basic good practice across Europe in external quality assurance, but do not attempt to provide detailed guidance about what should be examined or how quality assurance activities should be conducted. Those are matters of national autonomy, although the exchange of information amongst agencies and authorities is already leading to the emergence of convergent elements.

- There are, however, already some general principles of good practice in external quality assurance processes:
- institutional autonomy should be respected;
  - the interests of students and other stakeholders such as labour market representatives should be at the forefront of external quality assurance processes;
  - use should be made, wherever possible, of the results of institutions’ own internal quality assurance activities.

The ‘guidelines’ provide additional information about good practice and in some cases explain in more detail the meaning and importance of the standards. Although the guidelines are not part of the standards themselves, the standards should be considered in conjunction with them.

PART 1: EUROPEAN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE WITHIN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

1.1 POLICY AND PROCEDURES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

STANDARD:

Institutions should have a policy and associated procedures for the assurance of the quality and standards of their programmes and awards. They should also commit themselves explicitly to the development of a culture which recognises the importance of quality, and quality assurance, in their work. To achieve this, institutions should develop and implement a strategy for the continuous enhancement of quality.

The strategy, policy and procedures should have a formal status and be publicly available. They should also include a role for students and other stakeholders.

GUIDELINES:

Formal policies and procedures provide a framework within which higher education institutions can develop and monitor the effectiveness of their quality assurance systems. They also help to provide public confidence in institutional autonomy. Policies contain the statements of intentions and the principal means by which these will be achieved. Procedural guidance can give more detailed information about the ways in which the policy is implemented and provides a useful reference point for those who need to know about the practical aspects of carrying out the procedures.

The policy statement is expected to include:

- the relationship between teaching and research in the institution;
- the institution’s strategy for quality and standards;
- the organisation of the quality assurance system;
- the responsibilities of departments, schools, faculties and other organisational units and individuals for the

- assurance of quality;
- the involvement of students in quality assurance;
- the ways in which the policy is implemented, monitored and revised.

The realisation of the EHEA depends crucially on a commitment at all levels of an institution to ensuring that its programmes have clear and explicit intended outcomes; that its staff are ready, willing and able to provide teaching and learner support that will help its students achieve those outcomes; and that there is full, timely and tangible recognition of the contribution to its work by those of its staff who demonstrate particular excellence, expertise and dedication. All higher education institutions should aspire to improve and enhance the education they offer their students.

1.2 APPROVAL, MONITORING AND PERIODIC REVIEW OF PROGRAMMES AND AWARDS

STANDARD:

Institutions should have formal mechanisms for the approval, periodic review and monitoring of their programmes and awards.

GUIDELINES:

The confidence of students and other stakeholders in higher education is more likely to be established and maintained through effective quality assurance activities which ensure that programmes are well-designed, regularly monitored and periodically reviewed, thereby securing their continuing relevance and currency.

The quality assurance of programmes and awards are expected to include:

- development and publication of explicit intended learning outcomes;
- careful attention to curriculum and programme design and content;
- specific needs of different modes of delivery (e.g. full time, part-time, distance-learning, e-learning) and types of higher education (e.g. academic, vocational, professional);



- availability of appropriate learning resources;
- formal programme approval procedures by a body other than that teaching the programme;
- monitoring of the progress and achievements of students;
- regular periodic reviews of programmes (including external panel members);
- regular feedback from employers, labour market representatives and other relevant organisations;
- participation of students in quality assurance activities.

### 1.3 ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS

#### STANDARD:

Students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied consistently.

#### GUIDELINES:

The assessment of students is one of the most important elements of higher education. The outcomes of assessment have a profound effect on students' future careers. It is therefore important that assessment is carried out professionally at all times and that it takes into account the extensive knowledge which exists about testing and examination processes. Assessment also provides valuable information for institutions about the effectiveness of teaching and learners' support.

Student assessment procedures are expected to:

- be designed to measure the achievement of the intended learning outcomes and other programme objectives;
- be appropriate for their purpose, whether diagnostic, formative or summative;
- have clear and published criteria for marking;
- be undertaken by people who understand the role of assessment in the progression of students towards the achievement of the knowledge and skills associated with their intended qualification;
- where possible, not rely on the judgements of single examiners;
- take account of all the possible consequences of examination regulations;
- have clear regulations covering student absence, illness and other mitigating circumstances;
- ensure that assessments are conducted securely in accordance with the institution's stated procedures;
- be subject to administrative verification checks to

ensure the accuracy of the procedures.

In addition, students should be clearly informed about the assessment strategy being used for their programme, what examinations or other assessment methods they will be subject to, what will be expected of them, and the criteria that will be applied to the assessment of their performance.

### 1.4 QUALITY ASSURANCE OF TEACHING STAFF

#### STANDARD:

Institutions should have ways of satisfying themselves that staff involved with the teaching of students are qualified and competent to do so. They should be available to those undertaking external reviews, and commented upon in reports.

#### GUIDELINES:

Teachers are the single most important learning resource available to most students. It is important that those who teach have a full knowledge and understanding of the subject they are teaching, have the necessary skills and experience to transmit their knowledge and understanding effectively to students in a range of teaching contexts, and can access feedback on their own performance. Institutions should ensure that their staff recruitment and appointment procedures include a means of making certain that all new staff have at least the minimum necessary level of competence. Teaching staff should be given opportunities to develop and extend their teaching capacity and should be encouraged to value their skills. Institutions should provide poor teachers with opportunities to improve their skills to an acceptable level and should have the means to remove them from their teaching duties if they continue to be demonstrably ineffective.

### 1.5 LEARNING RESOURCES AND STUDENT SUPPORT

#### STANDARD:

Institutions should ensure that the resources available for the support of student learning are adequate and appropriate for each programme offered.

#### GUIDELINES:

In addition to their teachers, students rely on a range of resources to assist their learning. These vary from physical resources such as libraries or computing facilities to human support in the form of tutors,

counsellors, and other advisers. Learning resources and other support mechanisms should be readily accessible to students, designed with their needs in mind and responsive to feedback from those who use the services provided. Institutions should routinely monitor, review and improve the effectiveness of the support services available to their students.

### 1.6 INFORMATION SYSTEMS

#### STANDARD:

Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes of study and other activities.

#### GUIDELINES:

Institutional self-knowledge is the starting point for effective quality assurance. It is important that institutions have the means of collecting and analysing information about their own activities. Without this they will not know what is working well and what needs attention, or the results of innovatory practices. The quality-related information systems required by individual institutions will depend to some extent on local circumstances, but it is at least expected to cover:

- student progression and success rates;
- employability of graduates;
- students' satisfaction with their programmes;
- effectiveness of teachers;
- profile of the student population;
- learning resources available and their costs;
- the institution's own key performance indicators.

There is also value in institutions comparing themselves with other similar organisations within the EHEA and beyond. This allows them to extend the range of their self-knowledge and to access possible ways of improving their own performance.

### 1.7 PUBLIC INFORMATION

#### STANDARD:

Institutions should regularly publish up to date, impartial and objective information, both quantitative and qualitative, about the programmes and awards they are offering.

#### GUIDELINES:

In fulfilment of their public role, higher education institutions have a responsibility to provide information about the programmes they are offering, the intended learning outcomes of these, the qualifications they award, the teaching, learning and assessment procedures used, and the learning opportunities available to their students. Published information might also include the views and employment destinations of past students and the profile of the current student population. This information should be accurate, impartial, objective and readily accessible and should not be used simply as a marketing opportunity. The institution should verify that it meets its own expectations in respect of impartiality and objectivity.

PART 2: EUROPEAN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR THE EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

2.1 USE OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES

STANDARD:

External quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

GUIDELINES:

The standards for internal quality assurance contained in Part 1 provide a valuable basis for the external quality assessment process. It is important that the institutions’ own internal policies and procedures are carefully evaluated in the course of external procedures, to determine the extent to which the standards are being met.

If higher education institutions are to be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own internal quality assurance processes, and if those processes properly assure quality and standards, then external processes might be less intensive than otherwise.

2.2 DEVELOPMENT OF EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES

STANDARD:

The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.

GUIDELINES:

In order to ensure clarity of purpose and transparency of

procedures, external quality assurance methods should be designed and developed through a process involving key stakeholders, including higher education institutions. The procedures that are finally agreed should be published and should contain explicit statements of the aims and objectives of the processes as well as a description of the procedures to be used.

As external quality assurance makes demands on the institutions involved, a preliminary impact assessment should be undertaken to ensure that the procedures to be adopted are appropriate and do not interfere more than necessary with the normal work of higher education institutions.

2.3 CRITERIA FOR DECISIONS

STANDARD:

Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently.

GUIDELINES:

Formal decisions made by quality assurance agencies have a significant impact on the institutions and programmes that are judged. In the interests of equity and reliability, decisions should be based on published criteria and interpreted in a consistent manner. Conclusions should be based on recorded evidence and agencies should have in place ways of moderating conclusions, if necessary.

2.4 PROCESSES FIT FOR PURPOSE

STANDARD:

All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.

GUIDELINES:

Quality assurance agencies within the EHEA undertake different external processes for different purposes and in

different ways. It is of the first importance that agencies should operate procedures which are fit for their own defined and published purposes. Experience has shown, however, that there are some widely-used elements of external review processes which not only help to ensure their validity, reliability and usefulness, but also provide a basis for the European dimension to quality assurance.

Amongst these elements the following are particularly noteworthy:

- insistence that the experts undertaking the external quality assurance activity have appropriate skills and are competent to perform their task;
- the exercise of care in the selection of experts;
- the provision of appropriate briefing or training for experts;
- the use of international experts;
- participation of students;
- ensuring that the review procedures used are sufficient to provide adequate evidence to support the findings and conclusions reached;
- the use of the self-evaluation/site visit/draft report/published report/follow-up model of review;
- recognition of the importance of institutional improvement and enhancement policies as a fundamental element in the assurance of quality.

2.5 REPORTING

STANDARD:

Reports should be published and should be written in a style which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find.

GUIDELINES:

In order to ensure maximum benefit from external quality assurance processes, it is important that reports should meet the identified needs of the intended readership. Reports are sometimes intended for different readership groups and this will require careful attention to structure, content, style and tone.

In general, reports should be structured to cover description, analysis (including relevant evidence), conclusions, commendations, and recommendations. There should be sufficient preliminary explanation to enable a lay reader to understand the purposes of the review, its form, and the criteria used in making decisions. Key findings, conclusions and recommendations should be easily locatable by readers.

Reports should be published in a readily accessible form and there should be opportunities for readers and users of the reports (both within the relevant institution and outside it) to comment on their usefulness.

2.6 FOLLOW-UP PROCEDURES

STANDARD:

Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently.

GUIDELINES:

Quality assurance is not principally about individual external scrutiny events: It should be about continuously trying to do a better job. External quality assurance does not end with the publication of the report and should include a structured follow-up procedure to ensure that recommendations are dealt with appropriately and any required action plans drawn up and implemented. This may involve further meetings with institutional or programme representatives. The objective is to ensure that areas identified for improvement are dealt with speedily and that further enhancement is encouraged.

2.7 PERIODIC REVIEWS

STANDARD:

External quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance.



**GUIDELINES:**

Quality assurance is not a static but a dynamic process. It should be continuous and not “once in a lifetime”. It does not end with the first review or with the completion of the formal follow-up procedure. It has to be periodically renewed. Subsequent external reviews should take into account progress that has been made since the previous event. The process to be used in all external reviews should be clearly defined by the external quality assurance agency and its demands on institutions should not be greater than are necessary for the achievement of its objectives.

**2.8 System-wide analyses**

**STANDARD:**

Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments etc.

**GUIDELINES:**

All external quality assurance agencies collect a wealth of information about individual programmes and/or institutions and this provides material for structured analyses across whole higher education systems. Such analyses can provide very useful information about developments, trends, emerging good practice and areas of persistent difficulty or weakness and can become useful tools for policy development and quality enhancement. Agencies should consider including a research and development function within their activities, to help them extract maximum benefit from their work.

**Introduction to Part 3: European standards and guidelines for external quality assurance agencies**

The growth of European external quality assurance agencies has been expansive since the early 1990s. At the same time cooperation and sharing of best practices among agencies have been an integrated element in this development. Already in 1994/95 the so-called

European Pilot Projects initiated by the European Commission resulted in the mutual recognition by agencies of the basic methodology of quality assurance: independent agencies, self-evaluations, external site visits and public reporting, laid down in the 1998 EU Council Recommendation on quality assurance in higher education. The creation of ENQA in 2000 was therefore a natural formalisation of this development in cooperation, and ENQA has been able to build on the state-of-the-art consensus arrived at during the 1990s.

The European standards for external quality assurance agencies, which follow, have been developed on the premises of this development in the young history of European external quality assurance. Moreover it is the conscious ambition that the standards should be neither too detailed nor too prescriptive. They must not reduce the freedom of European quality assurance agencies to reflect in their organisations and processes the experiences and expectations of their nation or region. The standards must, though, ensure that the professionalism, credibility and integrity of the agencies are visible and transparent to their stakeholders and must permit comparability to be observable among the agencies and allow the necessary European dimension.

It should be added that in this way the standards do also contribute naturally to the work being done towards mutual recognition of agencies and the results of agency evaluations or accreditations. This work has been explored in the Nordic Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education (NOQA) and is part of the ‘Code of Good Practise’ by the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA).

Several ‘guidelines’ have been added to provide additional information about good practice and in some cases explain in more detail the meaning and importance of the standards. Although the guidelines are not part of the standards themselves, the standards should be considered in conjunction with them.

PART 3: EUROPEAN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES

3.1 USE OF EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

STANDARD:

The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

GUIDELINES:

The standards for external quality assurance contained in Part 2 provide a valuable basis for the external quality assessment process. The standards reflect best practices and experiences gained through the development of external quality assurance in Europe since the early 1990s. It is therefore important that these standards are integrated into the processes applied by external quality assurance agencies towards the higher education institutions.

The standards for external quality assurance should together with the standards for external quality assurance agencies constitute the basis for professional and credible external quality assurance of higher education institutions.

3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS

STANDARD:

Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.

3.3 ACTIVITIES  
STANDARD:

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis.

GUIDELINES:

These may involve evaluation, review, audit, assessment, accreditation or other similar activities and should be part of the core functions of the agency.

3.4 RESOURCES

STANDARD:

Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures.

3.5 MISSION STATEMENT

STANDARD:

Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.

GUIDELINES:

These statements should describe the goals and objectives of agencies’ quality assurance processes, the division of labour with relevant stakeholders in higher education, especially the higher education institutions, and the cultural and historical context of their work. The statements should make clear that the external quality assurance process is a major activity of the agency and that there exists a systematic approach to achieving its goals and objectives. There should also be documentation to demonstrate how the statements are translated into a clear policy and management plan.

3.6 INDEPENDENCE

STANDARD:

Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

GUIDELINES:

An agency will need to demonstrate its independence through measures, such as:

- its operational independence from higher education institutions and governments is guaranteed in official documentation (e.g. instruments of governance or legislative acts);
- the definition and operation of its procedures and methods, the nomination and appointment of external experts and the determination of the outcomes of its quality assurance processes are undertaken autonomously and independently from governments, higher education institutions, and organs of political influence;
- while relevant stakeholders in higher education, particularly students/learners, are consulted in the course of quality assurance processes, the final outcomes of the quality assurance processes remain the responsibility of the agency.

3.7 EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE CRITERIA AND PROCESSES USED BY THE AGENCIES

STANDARD:

The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available. These processes will normally be expected to include:

- a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process;
- an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and

- site visits as decided by the agency;
- publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes;
- a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.

GUIDELINES:

Agencies may develop and use other processes and procedures for particular purposes.

Agencies should pay careful attention to their declared principles at all times, and ensure both that their requirements and processes are managed professionally and that their conclusions and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even though the decisions are formed by groups of different people.

Agencies that make formal quality assurance decisions, or conclusions which have formal consequences should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of each agency.

3.8 ACCOUNTABILITY PROCEDURES

STANDARD:

Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.

GUIDELINES:

These procedures are expected to include the following:

1. A published policy for the assurance of the quality of the agency itself, made available on its website;
2. Documentation which demonstrates that:
  - the agency’s processes and results reflect its mission and goals of quality assurance;
  - the agency has in place, and enforces, a no-conflict-of-interest mechanism in the work of its external experts;

- the agency has reliable mechanisms that ensure the quality of any activities and material produced by subcontractors, if some or all of the elements in its quality assurance procedure are subcontracted to other parties;
  - the agency has in place internal quality assurance procedures which include an internal feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from its own staff and council/board); an internal reflection mechanism (i.e. means to react to internal and external recommendations for improvement); and an external feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from experts and reviewed institutions for future development) in order to inform and underpin its own development and improvement.
3. A mandatory cyclical external review of the agency's activities at least once every five years.

### 3. Peer Review system for quality assurance agencies

In Berlin the Ministers called ‘upon ENQA, through its members, in cooperation with the EUA, EURASHE, and ESIB, to [...] explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer review system for quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies or bodies’.

ENQA and its partners have met this call by building on the interpretation of the mandate that a system of peer review of agencies must include not only the peer review process itself, but also a careful consideration of the quality standards on which a review could be build. Further, there has been agreement in the process that peer review of agencies should be interpreted as basically the means to achieve the goal of transparency, visibility and comparability of quality of agencies.

Therefore, this report has as a major proposal the creation of a register of recognised external quality assurance agencies operating in higher education within Europe.

This proposal is in essence a response to expectations that there is likely soon to be an increase of quality assurance bodies keen to make a profit from the value of a recognition or accreditation label. Experience elsewhere has shown that it is difficult to control such enterprises, but Europe has a possibly unique opportunity to exercise practical management of this new market, not in order to protect the interests of already established agencies, but to make sure that the benefits of quality assurance are not diminished by the activities of disreputable practitioners.

The work on these proposals has principally taken into consideration the European context and demands. At the same time there has been awareness in the process that similar experiences and processes are developing internationally. This chapter therefore opens with a brief analysis of the international experiences and initiatives relevant for the drafting of this part of the report. It then outlines the proposed peer review system based on

the subsidiarity principle and the European standards for external quality assurance agencies. This outline leads to a presentation of the recommended register of external quality assurance agencies operating in Europe. The peer reviews and the agencies' compliance with the European standards play a crucial role in the composition of the register. Finally, a European Consultative Forum for Quality Assurance in Higher Education is proposed.

#### INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

Europe is not the only area where dynamic developments in the field of higher education quality assurance are currently taking place. This section describes some of the experiences and initiatives of organisations such as the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), the International Association of University Presidents (IAUP), the Council for Higher Education Accreditation in the United States (CHEA), OECD and UNESCO. The work of these organisations in relation to quality assurance have been found useful during the drafting of this report. Even though these international experiences have not been directly included in the specific recommendations, some key international elements are presented below in a manner that relates to the recommendations in this chapter.

The identification of good quality and good practices of external quality assurance agencies has also been on the international agenda for several years. INQAAHE discussed in 1999 and onwards a quality label for external quality assurance agencies, an idea originally initiated by the IAUP, in order to meet the need for higher education institutions to identify which agencies are qualified to fulfil the external quality assurance role. The quality label met widespread opposition and instead INQAAHE has focused on formulating good practice criteria for agencies. The result is a set of principles that presents common denominators of good practice while at the same time recognising the international diversity of agencies in terms of purposes and historical / cultural contexts.

In terms of the recommendations on peer review of agencies, the work done by CHEA is relevant. CHEA

is a non-governmental organisation functioning as an umbrella body for the US regional, specialised, national and professional accreditation agencies. Accrediting organisations that seek recognition by CHEA must demonstrate that they meet CHEA recognition standards. Accrediting organisations will be expected to advance academic quality, demonstrate accountability, encourage improvement, employ appropriate procedures, continually reassess accreditation practices and possess sufficient resources. CHEA will demand that members undergo so-called recognition reviews every six years. There are basic similarities and compatibility between the CHEA approach and the proposals of this report, for instance in terms of cyclical reviews. However, this report has given a priority to a distinct focus on the quality assurance of agencies.

A separate initiative has been taken jointly by OECD and UNESCO to elaborate guidelines for quality provision in cross-border higher education. The OECD-UNESCO guidelines will be finalised in 2005, but the drafting process has identified the contrast between the need to regulate the internationalisation of higher education and the fact that existing national quality assurance capacity often focuses exclusively on domestic delivery by domestic institutions. Therefore, it is posed as a challenge for the current quality assurance systems to develop appropriate methodologies and mechanisms to cover foreign providers and programmes in addition to national providers and programmes in order to maximise the benefits and limit the potential disadvantages of the internationalisation of higher education.

The proposed OECD-UNESCO guidelines recommend that external quality assurance agencies ensure that their quality assurance arrangements include foreign and for-profit institutions/providers as well as distance education delivery and other non-traditional modes of educational delivery. However, the drafting process of the guidelines also recognises that the inclusion of foreign providers in the remit of national agencies will in most cases require changes in national legislation and administrative procedures.

This report recognises the importance and implications

of internationalisation for the quality assurance of higher education institutions. Although it has been considered too early to include a reference to this in the proposed European standards for external quality assurance, the proposal for a European register does explicitly include agencies from outside Europe operating here as well as European agencies with cross-border operations.

It should also be recognised that the continuing European process fully meets the OECD-UNESCO recommendation that agencies should sustain and strengthen the existing regional and international networks.

#### CYCLICAL REVIEWS OF AGENCIES

The field of external quality assurance of higher education in Europe is relatively young. However, it may be considered an element of growing maturity among agencies that recent years have evidenced an interest in enhancing credibility of agency work by focusing on internal and external quality assurance of agencies themselves. An ENQA workshop in February 2003 in Sitges, Spain, had quality assurance of agencies as its theme. The participants discussed existing experiences of external evaluation of agencies and one conclusion of the workshop was a recommendation that ENQA should work towards making cyclical external reviews of member agencies. Accordingly, ENQA received the Berlin mandate at a time when discussion of external reviews of agencies had already begun in ENQA and been an element in E4 meetings.

This report recommends that any European agency should at no more than five- year intervals conduct or be submitted to a cyclical external review of its processes and activities. The results should be documented in a report which states the extent to which the agency is in compliance with the European standards for external quality assurance agencies (see Chapter 2, Part 3). In the EHEA the map of providers and operators in external quality assurance of higher education will no doubt be more complicated in the future. Therefore, it is important that non-ENQA members are included in considerations on quality assurance of agencies. And it is

even more important that agencies from outside Europe have an open opportunity, if they want it, to measure themselves against the recommended European standards. Therefore, the report does not wish to confine the focus of this recommendation to nationally recognised European agencies and thus by implication only actual or potential ENQA members. On the contrary, agencies from outside Europe, but operating in Europe, or European agencies that are not nationally recognised, must also be allowed to opt for a review that assesses its compliance with the European standards.

The general principles for cyclical reviews are proposed to be as follows:

- External quality assurance agencies established and officially recognised as national agencies by a Bologna signatory state should normally be reviewed on a national basis, thus respecting the subsidiarity principle – even if they also operate beyond national borders. These European national agencies may on the other hand also opt for reviews organised by ENQA rather than internal nationally based reviews. The reviews of agencies should include an assessment of whether the agencies are in compliance with the European standards for external quality assurance agencies.
- Agencies not established and officially recognised in a Bologna signatory state may on their own initiative opt to be reviewed against the European standards for external quality assurance agencies.
- The reviews should follow the process comprising a self-evaluation, an independent panel of experts and a published report.

An external review will typically be initiated at the national or agency level. It is therefore expected that reviews of agencies will usually follow from national regulations or from the internal quality assurance processes in place in the agency. This report wishes strongly to emphasise the importance of respecting the subsidiarity principle, and it is therefore proposed that ENQA, in respect of its own members, takes the initiative toward an agency only in the case where after five years no initiative has been taken nationally or by the agency itself. In case the agency is a non-ENQA member and

after five years no initiative has been taken nationally or by the agency itself, the European Register Committee is responsible for initiating the review.

When national authorities initiate reviews, the purpose could obviously be quite broad and include the agency's fulfilment of the national mandate, e.g. However, it is a core element in this proposal that reviews – regardless of whether they are initiated at a national, agency or ENQA level – must always explicitly consider the extent to which the agency conforms with the European standards for external quality assurance agencies. The ENQA General Assembly decided at its meeting in November 2004 that the membership criteria of ENQA should conform with the proposed European standards for external quality assurance agencies. Accordingly, the review of an agency will not only make evident the level of conformity with the European standards, but also at the same time indicate the level of compliance with ENQA membership criteria.

Finally, the report stresses that the involvement of international experts with appropriate expertise and experience will provide substantial benefit to the review process.

The follow-up of a cyclical review will first and foremost be the responsibility of the national authorities or owners of the agency and, of course, of the agency itself. ENQA will have a role in the followup only in the case of member agencies where ENQA must certify the degree to which the member agency meets the European standards for external quality assurance agencies according to the review. ENQA regulations will specify the consequences if this is not the case.

An illustrative outline of an exemplary process of an external review of an agency is shown in the annex to this report.

REGISTER OF EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES  
OPERATING IN EUROPE

PROPOSED REGISTER STRUCTURE		REVIEWED		NOT REVIEWED
European national agencies	National operators	Compliance with European standards	Non-compliance with European standards	
	Cross-border operators			
European non-national agencies				
Extra-European agencies operating in Europe				

ENQA committed itself before the Berlin Ministerial meeting of 2003 to develop in cooperation with the relevant stakeholders a European register of quality assurance agencies, covering public, private, and thematic agencies, operating or planning to operate in Europe.

The register would meet the interest of higher education institutions and governments in being able to identify professional and credible quality assurance agencies operating in Europe. This interest has firstly its basis in the complicated area of recognition of non-national degrees. Recognition procedures would be strengthened if it were transparent to what extent providers were themselves quality assured by recognised agencies. Secondly, it is increasingly possible for higher education institutions to seek quality assurance from agencies across national borders. Higher education institutions would of course be helped in this process by being able to identify professional agencies from a reliable register. The most valuable asset of the register would thus be its informative value to institutions and other stakeholders, and the register could in itself become a very useful instrument for achieving transparency and comparability of external quality assurance of higher education institutions.

The register must make evident the level of compliance of entrants with the European standards for external quality assurance agencies. However, it is important to stress that this report does not aim at proposing the register as a ranking instrument.

The register should be open for applications from all agencies providing services within Europe, including those operating from countries outside Europe or those with a transnational or international basis. The agencies will be placed into different sections of the register depending on whether they are peer reviewed or not, whether they comply with the European standards for external quality assurance agencies or not, and whether they operate strictly nationally or across borders.

A possible structure for the register is therefore:

Section 1. Peer reviewed agencies, divided into the following categories:

- European national agencies that have been reviewed and fulfil all the European standards for external quality assurance agencies.
- European national agencies that have been reviewed, but do not fulfil all the European standards for external quality assurance agencies.
- Non-national and extra-European agencies that operate in Europe, have been reviewed and fulfil all the European standards for external quality assurance agencies.
- Non-national and extra-European agencies that operate in Europe and have been reviewed, but do not fulfil all the European standards for external quality assurance agencies.

Section 2. Non-reviewed agencies

- European national agencies, non-national agencies and extra-European agencies that have not been reviewed and are therefore listed according to information gained from their application for inclusion in the register.

Presented in a grid, the structure of the register is this: A European Register Committee will decide on admissions to the European register. The committee will use agency compliance with the European standards for external quality assurance agencies as identified in the cyclical review as one criterion for placement in the register. Other criteria should be developed which will take account of the diversity of the higher education systems.

The committee will be a light, non-bureaucratic construction with nine members nominated by EURASHE, ESIB, EUA, ENQA and organisations representing European employers, unions and professional organisations plus government representatives. These members will act in an individual capacity and not as mandated representatives of the nominating organisations. ENQA will perform the secretarial duties for the committee which will meet at least on a semi-annual basis. The European Register Committee will as one of its first



implementation tasks formalise the ownership of the register.

Another immediate task for the European Register Committee must be to establish an independent and credible appeals system to secure the rights of those that have been refused or that cannot accept their placement in the register. This appeals system should be an element in the protocol to be drafted by the committee soon after it has become operational.

#### EUROPEAN CONSULTATIVE FORUM FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Since the Prague meeting in 2001 the E4 group, consisting of ENQA, EUA, ESIB and EURASHE, has met on a regular basis to discuss respective views on the Bologna Process and European quality in higher education. Since the Berlin meeting in 2003 the E4 meetings have had as their major focus the implementation of the mandate of the Ministers on quality assurance in higher education.

This cooperation at the European level has proved constructive. The four organisations have therefore agreed that a European Consultative Forum for Quality Assurance in Higher Education will continue to exist building from the E4 group. The foundation of such a forum would in practical terms establish the current cooperation between ENQA, EUA, EURASHE and ESIB on a more permanent basis. The forum would function primarily as a consultative and advisory forum for the major European stakeholders and it would resemble the current arrangements where the four respective organisations finance their own expenses and participation without the creation of a new administrative structure. In the longer term the forum should also include labour market representatives.

## 4. FUTURE PERSPECTIVES AND CHALLENGES

This report contains proposals and recommendations that have been developed and endorsed by the key European players in the world of quality assurance in higher education. The very existence of the report is a testimony to the achievement of a joint understanding in a field where such an understanding might be thought inherently unlikely, given the different interests in play. The proposals offer increased transparency, security and information about higher education for students and society more generally. They equally offer higher education institutions recognition and credibility and opportunities to demonstrate their dedication to high quality in an increasingly competitive and sceptical environment. For the quality assurance agencies the proposals enhance their own quality and credibility and connect them more productively to their wider European professional fraternity.

The proposals will remain no more than proposals, however, if they are not accompanied by an effective implementation strategy. If approved by the Ministers in Bergen, immediate steps will be taken to begin to introduce some of the key elements of this report. The register of quality assurance agencies should be envisaged as being started during the latter half of 2005 and to be ready to go on-line in 2006. The ENQA secretariat has made provision for the extra resources that will be necessary for this purpose. Following the Ministerial meeting, ENQA will take the necessary concrete initiatives towards establishing the European Register Committee. The committee will begin its work with formalising the ownership of the register and drafting a protocol based on the preliminary work done by ENQA in the spring of 2005. The first of the cyclical reviews should be expected to take place during 2005.

The European Consultative Forum for Quality Assurance in Higher Education will also be an early initiative. Thus, the outcomes of the Bergen Ministerial meeting, and the establishment of the forum will be the main theme of

the next meeting between ENQA and its E4 partners in June 2005. In addition, the future cooperation with other key stakeholders such as labour market representatives will be subject to discussions. ENQA has also arranged a meeting with the other European quality assurance networks prior to the next ENQA General Assembly in September 2005.

The possibility of rapid implementation of certain of the proposals of this report should not be taken to mean that the task of embedding the rest of them will be easy. It will take longer for the internal and external quality assurance standards to be widely adopted by institutions and agencies, because their acceptance will depend on a willingness to change and develop on the part of signatory states with longestablished and powerful higher education systems. What is proposed in the internal quality assurance standards will be challenging for some higher education institutions, especially where there is a new and developing tradition of quality assurance or where the focus on students' needs and their preparation to enter the employment market is not embedded in the institutional culture. Similarly, the standards for external quality assurance and for quality assurance agencies themselves will require all participants, and especially the agencies, to look very carefully at themselves and to measure their practices against the European expectation. The new cyclical review procedure will provide a timely focus for this purpose. It will only be when the benefits of adoption of the standards are seen that there is likely to be general acceptance of them.

The EHEA operates on the basis of individual national responsibility for higher education and this implies autonomy in matters of external quality assurance. Because of this the report is not and cannot be regulatory but makes its recommendations and proposals in a spirit of mutual respect among professionals; experts drawn from higher education institutions including students; ministries; and quality assurance agencies. Some signatory states may want to enshrine the standards and review process in their legislative or administrative frameworks. Others may wish to take a longer view of the appropriateness of doing so, weighing the advantages of change against the strengths of the

status quo. The proposed European Consultative Forum for Quality Assurance in Higher Education should prove a useful place in which to discuss, debate and learn about new thinking, the experiences of other systems and the similarities and dissimilarities of national experiences.

All in all, there will be a considerable and challenging workload for ENQA, its E4 partners and other key stakeholders to get to grips with in the coming years. The report therefore makes it clear that completion of this report is not the same thing as fulfilling the Bologna goal of a quality assurance dimension for the EHEA. Ahead lies more work to implement the recommendations of the report and secure the implied quality culture among both the higher education institutions and the external quality assurance agencies. What has been set in motion by the Berlin mandate will need continuing maintenance and coaxing if it is to provide the fully functioning European dimension of quality assurance for the EHEA.

A European higher education area with strong, autonomous and effective higher education institutions, a keen sense of the importance of quality and standards, good peer reviews, credible quality assurance agencies, an effective register and increased co-operation with other stakeholders, such as employers, is now possible and the proposals contained in this report will go a long way towards making that vision a reality.

## ANNEX: CYCLICAL REVIEW OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES<sup>24</sup> – A THEORETICAL MODEL

The model presented below is a proposed indicative outline for a process of external review of an external quality assurance agency. It is presented as an example of a credible process suited to identify compliance with the European standards for external quality assurance agencies. However, note must be taken that the purpose is instructive and illustrative. Therefore, the level of detail is high and most likely higher than what will be perceived as needed in individual peer reviews of agencies. It follows from this that in no way must the process presented here be considered as a standard in itself. Further, it should be noted that in the presented example the term “evaluation” is applied to cover objectives and processes. Terms, such as “accreditation” or “audit”, might as well be applied.

The process covers the following elements:

- formulating terms of reference and protocol for the review;
- nomination and appointment of panel of experts;
- self-evaluation by the agency;
- site visit;
- reporting.

### 1. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The terms of reference must identify the goals of the review in terms of the perspectives and interests of authorities, stakeholders and the agency itself. All the main tasks and operations of the agency must be covered and in such a manner that it is evident that no hidden agendas are present.

<sup>24</sup> The structure of the annex approximates the one documented recently in a manual of a project on mutual recognition of quality assurance agencies in the Nordic countries.

## 2. Self-evaluation

### 2.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION REQUIRED FROM AGENCY AS BASIS OF REVIEW

Relevant background information is necessary to understand the context in which the agency is working. The section is expected to include:

#### 2.1.1 A brief outline of the national higher education system, including:

- degree structure;
- institutional structure;
- procedures and involved parties in establishing new subjects, programmes and institutions;
- other quality assurance procedures;
- status of higher education institutions in relation to the government.

#### 2.1.2 A brief account of the history of the particular agency and of the evaluation of higher education in general:

- mission statement;
- establishment of the agency (government, higher education institutions, others);
- description of the legal framework and other formal regulations concerning the agency (e.g. parliamentary laws, ministerial orders or decrees);
- the financing of the agency;
- placement of the right to initiate evaluations;
- internal organisation of the agency; including procedures for appointment and composition of board/council;
- other responsibilities of the agency than the evaluation of higher education;
- international activities of the agency, including formal agreements as well as other activities, e.g. participation in conferences, working groups and staff exchange;
- role of the agency in follow-up on evaluations: consequences and sanctions.

### 2.2 EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE UNDERTAKEN BY THE AGENCY

Evidence should be produced indicating that the agency undertakes on a regular basis external quality assurance of higher education institutions or programmes. This quality assurance should involve either evaluation, accreditation, review, audit or assessment, and these are part of the core functions of the agency.

By ‘regular’ it is understood that evaluations are planned on the basis of a systematic procedure and that several quality assessments have been conducted over the last two years. This evidence should include:

- a description of the methodological scope of the agency;
- an account of the number of quality assessments conducted and the number of units evaluated.

### 2.3 EVALUATION METHOD APPLIED BY THE AGENCY

#### 2.3.1 Background information

An account of the overall planning of an evaluation and other fundamental issues is needed to be able to determine if the agency is working on the basis of transparent methodological procedures.

This account should include:

- the procedures for briefing of and communication with the evaluated institutions;
- the agency strategy for student participation;
- the procedures related to establishing the terms of reference/project plan of the individual assessment;
- the reference(s) for evaluation (predefined criteria, legal documents, subject benchmarks, professional standards, the stated goals of the evaluated institution);
- the extent to which the methodological elements are modified to specific reviews.

### 2.3.2 Elements of methodology

An account giving evidence that the methodology the agency is working on is pre-defined and public and that review results are public.

The methodology includes:

- self-evaluation or equivalent procedure of the given object of evaluation;
- external evaluation by a group of experts and site visits as decided by the agency;
- publication of a report with public results.

The agency can also work out and apply other methodologies fit for special purposes.

The agency's decisions and reports are consistent in terms of principles and requirements, even if different groups form the judgements.

If the agency makes evaluation decisions, there is an appeals system. This methodology is applied to the needs of the agencies.

If the agency is to make recommendations and/or conditional resolutions, it has a follow-up procedure to check on the results.

### 2.3.3 An account of the role of the external expert group

The account on the role of the external expert group should include:

- procedures for nomination and appointment of experts, including criteria for the use of international experts, and representatives of stakeholders such as employers and students;
- methods of briefing and training of experts;
- meetings between experts: number, scope and time schedule in relation to the overall evaluation process;
- division of labour between agency and experts;
- role of the agency's staff in the evaluations;
- identification and appointment of the member(s) of staff at the agency to be responsible for the evaluation.

### 2.3.4 Documentation

Several accounts of the agency's procedures for collecting documentation are needed to determine the procedures related to the self-evaluation of the agency and site visits:

#### 2.3.4.1 An account of the procedures related to self-evaluation

This account should include:

- specification of content in the guidelines provided by the agency;
- procedural advice provided by the agency;
- requirements for composition of self-evaluation teams, including the role of students;
- training/information of self-evaluation teams;
- time available for conducting the self-evaluation.

#### 2.3.4.2 An account of the procedures related to the site visit

This account should include:

- questionnaires/interviewing protocols;
- principles for selection of participants/informants (categories and specific participants);
- principles for the length of the visit;
- number of meetings and average length;
- documentation of the meetings (internal/external, minutes, transcriptions etc.);
- working methods of the external expert group.

#### 2.3.4.3 The reports

The documentation should include the following information on the reports:

- purpose of the report;
- drafting of the report (agency staff or experts);
- format of report (design and length);
- content of report (documentation or only analysis/recommendations);
- principles for feedback from the evaluated parties on the draft report;

- publication procedures and policy (e.g. handling of the media);
- immediate follow-up (e.g. seminars and conferences);
- long-term follow-up activities (e.g. follow-up evaluation or visit).

### 2.3.5 System of appeal

The agency documents a method for appeals against its decisions and how this methodology is applied to the needs of the agency. It must be evident from the documentation to what extent the appeals system is based on a hearing process through which the agency can provide those under evaluation a means to comment on and question the outcomes of the evaluation.

Basically, the agency must provide evidence that the appeals system provides for those under evaluation an opportunity to express opinions about evaluation outcomes.

### 2.4 ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

This additional documentation should provide an account of the use of surveys, statistical material or other kinds of documentation not mentioned elsewhere. This material should be public.

### 2.5 PROCEDURES FOR A QUALITY SYSTEM FOR AGENCIES

The agency must document that it has in place internal quality assurance mechanisms that conform to those stipulated in the European standards for external quality assurance agencies.

### 2.6 FINAL REFLECTIONS

An analysis of the agency's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats is needed in order to give an account of the capacity of the agency to adapt to new demands and trends and to permanently improve its actions while maintaining a solid and credible methodological framework and governance model.

## 3. GUIDELINES FOR THE EXTERNAL REVIEW PANEL

These guidelines describe the expectations to the external review panel. They comprise guidance on:

- appointment and general organisation;
- site visit;
- drafting of the report.

As described above, the agency under review should provide a self-evaluation report according to the provided guidelines. The self-study should be sent to the external review panel no later than a month before the visit.

### 3.1 APPOINTMENT OF THE EXTERNAL REVIEW PANEL

This section concerns the appointment of the experts that should conduct the review. The external expert group should consist of the following experts:

- one or two quality assurance experts (international);
- representative of higher education institutions (national);
- student member (national);
- stakeholder member (for instance an employer, national).

One of these experts should be elected Chair of the external review panel.

It is also recommended that the panel should be supplemented with a person who, in an independent capacity from the agency, would act as a secretary.

Nominations of the experts may come from the agencies, stakeholders or local authorities but in order to ensure that the review is credible and trustworthy, it is essential that the task of appointing the experts be given to a third party outside the agency involved. This third party could for instance be ENQA or an agency not involved in the process. The basis for the recognition of the experts should be declarations of their independence. However, the agency under review should have the possibility to comment on the final composition of the panel.

### 3.2 SITE VISIT

A protocol must be available for the site visit along lines such as the following:

The visit is recommended to have a duration of two-three days, including preparation and follow-up, depending on the external review panel's prior knowledge of the agency under review and its context. The day before the visit the panel will meet and agree on relevant themes for the visit. The purpose of the site visit is to validate the self-study. Interview guides should be drafted with this perspective in mind.

The visit could include separate meetings with members from the agency board, management, staff, experts, owners/key stakeholders and representatives from evaluated institutions at management level as well as members from the internal self- evaluation committees.

### 3.3 PREPARATION OF THE REPORT

Apart from fulfilling the general terms of reference the report must focus in a precise manner on compliance with the European standards for external quality assurance agencies as specified in the self-study protocol, as well as with possibilities for and recommendations on future improvements.

After the visit the external review panel assisted by the secretary will draft a report. The final version should be sent to the agency under review for comments on factual errors.

## 6.3 Conclusions for follow-up from the Irish Presidency Conference on quality assurance in qualifications frameworks

\_ Publication Version, 13 March 2013

European qualifications frameworks can facilitate the comparison and recognition of qualifications across Europe on the basis of mutual trust. Qualifications frameworks make credible contributions to mutual trust when they are supported by strong quality assurance systems. Only in this way can we have confidence that the qualifications are fit for purpose and that those holding qualifications can perform the tasks that society proposes to them, including participating in lifelong learning and working for others or creating new employment for themselves and others.

Over 150 delegates from over 35 countries discussed a wide range of issues over two days. The following conclusions were identified for followup. The proceedings will later be published in full.

1. We encourage the Commission, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) Advisory Group and the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG) to look at ways of facilitating greater dialogue between the main actors in Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Higher Education (HE) on the topic of quality assurance and qualifications frameworks. The EQF Advisory Group and the BFUG working group on structural reforms, in cooperation with ENQA and EQAVET, should review and make proposals to strengthen the common principles of quality assurance to be applied across HE and VET, such as found in Annexe 3 to the EQF Recommendation.
2. Providers in the VET and HE sectors and their respective public authorities are urged to make their quality assurance arrangements mutually intelligible, to share good practices across sectors and to learn about each other's approaches to implementing learning outcomes.
3. Those charged with the revision of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education should incorporate reference to NQFs based on learning outcomes.
4. Similarly, the current evaluation of EQAVET should be a launchpad to reinforce the implementation of learning outcomes and National Qualifications

Frameworks (NQFs) to improve programmes and generate more widespread trust in VET qualifications. The Commission should explore how to give greater international transparency and comparability to diverse quality assurance systems used in VET throughout Europe.

5. We call on national authorities to communicate more effectively the quality assurance and qualifications instruments developed at a European level to education and training providers in order to change the cultures of pedagogy and practice in their systems. The authorities should also evaluate the effectiveness of such communications efforts.
6. Member states should ensure that the initial and continuing formation of teachers, trainers and lecturers should develop the competence of educators in the use of the learning outcomes paradigm to promote studentcentred learning. The Commission, working with the Thematic Network on Teacher Education in Europe, should examine how best to promote the implementation of this recommendation.
7. Employers, especially through their intermediate bodies, should express their skills needs and assist the bodies responsible for qualifications and NQFs to ensure that these needs are reflected in qualifications.
8. Feedback from employers and other social partners, as well as from learners, is critical to ensuring that the quality assurance systems function effectively. We call on employers, individually and through their intermediate bodies, to participate in local internal quality assurance of education and training providers and in the external quality assurance systems organised at national or other levels. We consider however that providers of education and training must in turn match the commitment of employers by responding to the feedback received.
9. Member states should design or extend their NQFs to accommodate quality assured qualifications arising from outside current formal systems. The

Commission, with the EQF Advisory Group, should explore methods to ensure coherent alignment of international qualifications with NQFs and EQF.

10. Empowerment of various stakeholders in the education and training systems in framework development and implementation is an essential feature of the European model. Public authorities, providers, and social partners in member states are encouraged to support similar developments in other regions through taking part in bilateral and multilateral projects and initiatives. The Commission, with EQF Advisory Group and European Training Foundation, is asked to consider how best to respond to requests from countries outside the Education and Training 2020 Policy Cooperation to demonstrate the affinity of their NQFs to the EQF. National qualifications authorities and their European counterparts are urged to support measures that enhance mutual recognition of qualifications between Europe and the rest of the world. We support the proposal that a bridging declaration on the recognition of qualifications between Europe and Asia be brought to the Fourth AsiaEurope Meeting of Ministers of Education in May 2013.
11. We look forward to the Commission followup to the communication Rethinking Education in particular the European Area of Skills and Qualifications which aims to increase synergies between transparency tools. We encourage member states and other stakeholders to participate in this debate.

## 6.4 Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, and in particular Article 149(4) and Article 150(4) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the Commission,

Having regard to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee<sup>25</sup>,

Having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions<sup>26</sup>,

Acting in accordance with the procedure laid down in Article 251 of the Treaty<sup>27</sup>,

Whereas:

1. The development and recognition of citizens' knowledge, skills and competence are crucial for the development of individuals, competitiveness, employment and social cohesion in the Community. Such development and recognition should facilitate transnational mobility for workers and learners and contribute to meeting the requirements of supply and demand in the European labour market. Access to and participation in lifelong learning for all, including disadvantaged people, and the use of qualifications should therefore be promoted and improved at national and Community level.
2. The Lisbon European Council in 2000 concluded that increased transparency of qualifications should be one of the main components necessary to adapt education and training systems in the Community to the demands of the knowledge society. Furthermore, the Barcelona European Council in 2002 called for closer cooperation in the university sector and

<sup>25</sup> OJ C 175, 27.7.2007, p. 74.

<sup>26</sup> OJ C 146, 30.6.2007, p. 77.

<sup>27</sup> Opinion of the European Parliament of 24 October 2007 (not yet published in the Official Journal) and Council Decision of 14 February 2008.

<sup>28</sup> OJ C 163, 9.7.2002, p. 1

improvement of transparency and recognition methods in the area of vocational education and training.

3. The Council Resolution of 27 June 2002 on lifelong learning<sup>28</sup> invited the Commission, in close cooperation with the Council and Member States, to develop a framework for the recognition of qualifications for both education and training, building on the achievements of the Bologna process and promoting similar action in the area of vocational training.
4. The joint reports of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the 'Education and Training 2010' work programme, adopted in 2004 and 2006, stressed the need to develop a European Qualifications Framework.
5. In the context of the Copenhagen process, the conclusions of the Council and the representatives of the governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council of 15 November 2004 on the future priorities of enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training gave priority to the development of an open and flexible European Qualifications Framework, founded on transparency and mutual trust, which should stand as a common reference covering both education and training.
6. The validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes should be promoted in accordance with the Council conclusions on common European principles for the identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning of 28 May 2004.
7. The Brussels European Councils of March 2005 and March 2006 underlined the importance of adopting a European Qualifications Framework.
8. This Recommendation takes into account Decision No 2241/2004/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 December 2004 on a single Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences (Europass)<sup>29</sup> and Recommendation 2006/962/EC of the European Parliament and of the



Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning<sup>29</sup>.

9. This Recommendation is compatible with the framework for the European Higher Education Area and cycle descriptors agreed by the ministers responsible for higher education in 45 European countries at their meeting in Bergen on 19 and 20 May 2005 within the framework of the Bologna process.
10. The Council conclusions on quality assurance in vocational education and training of 23 and 24 May 2004, Recommendation 2006/143/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 February 2006 on further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education<sup>31</sup> and the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area agreed by the ministers responsible for higher education at their meeting in Bergen contain common principles for quality assurance which should underpin the implementation of the European Qualifications Framework.
11. (This Recommendation is without prejudice to Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications<sup>32</sup>, which confers rights and obligations on both the relevant national authority and the migrant. Reference to the European Qualifications Framework levels on qualifications should not affect access to the labour market where professional qualifications have been recognised in accordance with Directive 2005/36/EC.
12. The objective of this Recommendation is to create a common reference framework which should serve as a translation device between different qualifications systems and their levels, whether

for general and higher education or for vocational education and training. This will improve the transparency, comparability and portability of citizens' qualifications issued in accordance with the practice in the different Member States. Each level of qualification should, in principle, be attainable by way of a variety of educational and career paths. The European Qualifications Framework should, moreover, enable international sectoral organisations to relate their qualifications systems to a common European reference point and thus show the relationship between international sectoral qualifications and national qualifications systems. This Recommendation therefore contributes to the wider objectives of promoting lifelong learning and increasing the employability, mobility and social integration of workers and learners. Transparent quality assurance principles and information exchange will support its implementation, by helping to build mutual trust.

13. This Recommendation should contribute to modernising education and training systems, the interrelationship of education, training and employment and building bridges between formal, non-formal and informal learning, leading also to the validation of learning outcomes acquired through experience.
14. This Recommendation does not replace or define national qualifications systems and/or qualifications. The European Qualifications Framework does not describe specific qualifications or an individual's competences and particular qualifications should be referenced to the appropriate European Qualifications Framework level by way of the relevant national qualifications systems.
15. Given its non-binding nature, this Recommendation conforms to the principle of subsidiarity by supporting and supplementing Member States' activities by facilitating further cooperation between them to increase transparency and to promote mobility and lifelong learning. It should be implemented in accordance with national legislation and practice.

16. Since the objective of this Recommendation, namely the creation of a common reference framework serving as a translation device between different qualifications systems and their levels, cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States and can therefore, by reason of the scale and effects of the action envisaged, be better achieved at Community level, the Community may adopt measures, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity as set out in Article 5 of the Treaty. In accordance with the principle of proportionality as set out in that Article, this Recommendation does not go beyond what is necessary in order to achieve that objective,

#### HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT MEMBER STATES:

1. use the European Qualifications Framework as a reference tool to compare the qualification levels of the different qualifications systems and to promote both lifelong learning and equal opportunities in the knowledge-based society, as well as the further integration of the European labour market, while respecting the rich diversity of national education systems;
2. relate their national qualifications systems to the European Qualifications Framework by 2010, in particular by referencing, in a transparent manner, their qualification levels to the levels set out in Annex II, and, where appropriate, by developing national qualifications frameworks in accordance with national legislation and practice;
3. adopt measures, as appropriate, so that, by 2012, all new qualification certificates, diplomas and 'Europass' documents issued by the competent authorities contain a clear reference, by way of national qualifications systems, to the appropriate European Qualifications Framework level;
4. use an approach based on learning outcomes when defining and describing qualifications, and promote the validation of non-formal and informal learning in accordance with the common European principles agreed in the Council conclusions of 28 May 2004, paying particular attention to those citizens most likely to be subject to unemployment or insecure forms of employment, for whom such an approach could help increase participation in lifelong learning and access to the labour market;
5. promote and apply the principles of quality assurance in education and training set out in Annex III when relating higher education and vocational education and training qualifications within national qualifications systems to the European Qualifications Framework;

<sup>29</sup> OJ L 390, 31.12.2004, p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> OJ L 394, 30.12.2006, p. 10.

<sup>31</sup> OJ L 64, 4.3.2006, p. 60.

<sup>32</sup> OJ L 255, 30.9.2005, p. 22. Directive as amended by Council Directive 2006/100/EC (OJ L 363, 20.12.2006, p. 141).

6. designate national coordination points linked to the particular structures and requirements of the Member States, in order to support and, in conjunction with other relevant national authorities, guide the relationship between national qualifications systems and the European Qualifications Framework with a view to promoting the quality and transparency of that relationship.

The tasks of those national coordination points should include:

- (a) referencing levels of qualifications within national qualifications systems to the European Qualifications Framework levels described in Annex II;
- (b) ensuring that a transparent methodology is used to reference national qualifications levels to the European Qualifications Framework in order to facilitate comparisons between them on the one hand, and ensuring that the resulting decisions are published on the other;
- (c) providing access to information and guidance to stakeholders on how national qualifications relate to the European Qualifications Framework through national qualifications systems;
- (d) promoting the participation of all relevant stakeholders including, in accordance with national legislation and practice, higher education and vocational education and training institutions, social partners, sectors and experts on the comparison and use of qualifications at the European level.

#### ENDORSE THE COMMISSION'S INTENTION TO:

1. support Member States in carrying out the above tasks and international sectoral organisations in using the reference levels and principles of the European Qualifications Framework as set out in this Recommendation, in particular by facilitating cooperation, exchanging good practice and testing

— *inter alia* through voluntary peer review and pilot projects under Community programmes, by launching information and consultation exercises with social dialogue committees — and developing support and guidance material;

2. establish, by 23 April 2009, a European Qualifications Framework advisory group, composed of representatives of Member States and involving the European social partners and other stakeholders, as appropriate, responsible for providing overall coherence and promoting transparency of the process of relating qualifications systems to the European Qualifications Framework;
3. assess and evaluate, in cooperation with the Member States and after consulting the stakeholders concerned, the action taken in response to this Recommendation, including the remit and duration of the advisory group, and, by 23 April 2013, report to the European Parliament and to the Council on the experience gained and implications for the future, including, if necessary, the possible review and revision of this Recommendation;
4. promote close links between the European Qualifications Framework and existing or future European systems for credit transfer and accumulation in higher education and vocational education and training, in order to improve citizens' mobility and facilitate the recognition of learning outcomes.

Done at Strasbourg, 23 April 2008.

For the European Parliament, The President  
H.G. PÖTTERING

For the Council The President  
J. LANARČIČ

## ANNEX I

### Definitions

For the purposes of the Recommendation, the definitions which apply are the following:

- (1) 'qualification' means a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards;
- (2) 'national qualifications system' means all aspects of a Member State's activity related to the recognition of learning and other mechanisms that link education and training to the labour market and civil society. This includes the development and implementation of institutional arrangements and processes relating to quality assurance, assessment and the award of qualifications. A national qualifications system may be composed of several subsystems and may include a national qualifications framework;
- (3) 'national qualifications framework' means an instrument for the classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved, which aims to integrate and coordinate national qualifications subsystems and improve the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society;
- (4) 'sector' means a grouping of professional activities on the basis of their main economic function, product, service or technology;
- (5) 'international sectoral organisation' means an association of national organisations, including, for example, employers and professional bodies, which represents the interests of national sectors;
- (6) 'learning outcomes' means statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on

completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence;

- (7) 'knowledge' means the outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of work or study. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual;
- (8) 'skills' means the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) or practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments);
- (9) 'competence' means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.

ANNEX II

Descriptors defining levels in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

Each of the 8 levels is defined by a set of descriptors indicating the learning outcomes relevant to qualifications at that level in any system of qualifications			
	Knowledge	Skills	Competence
	In the context of EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual	In the context of EQF, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments)	In the context of EQF, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy
Level 1 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 1 are	basic general knowledge	basic skills required to carry out simple tasks	work or study under direct supervision in a structured context
Level 2 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 2 are	basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study	basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information in order to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools	work or study under supervision with some autonomy
Level 3 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 3 are	knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study	a range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information	take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems
Level 4 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 4 are	factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study	a range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study	exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities
Level 5 (*) The learning outcomes relevant to Level 5 are	comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge	a comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems	exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change review and develop performance of self and others

Level 6 (**) The learning outcomes relevant to Level 6 are	advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles	advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study	manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decisionmaking in unpredictable work or study contexts take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups
Level 7 (***) The learning outcomes relevant to Level 7 are	highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields	specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields	manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams
Level 8 (****) The learning outcomes relevant to Level 8 are	knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields	the most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, required to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice	demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research

Compatibility with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area  
The Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area provides descriptors for cycles.  
Each cycle descriptor offers a generic statement of typical expectations of achievements and abilities associated with qualifications that represent the end of that cycle.  
(\*) The descriptor for the higher education short cycle (within or linked to the first cycle), developed by the Joint Quality Initiative as part of the Bologna process, corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 5.  
(\*\*) The descriptor for the first cycle in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area agreed by the ministers responsible for higher education at their meeting in Bergen in May 2005 in the framework of the Bologna process corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 6.  
(\*\*\*) The descriptor for the second cycle in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area agreed by the ministers responsible for higher education at their meeting in Bergen in May 2005 in the framework of the Bologna process corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 7.  
(\*\*\*\*) The descriptor for the third cycle in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area agreed by the ministers responsible for higher education at their meeting in Bergen in May 2005 in the framework of the Bologna process corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 8

## ANNEX III

### Common Principles for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training in the context of the European Qualifications Framework

When implementing the European Qualifications Framework, quality assurance – which is necessary to ensure accountability and the improvement of higher education and vocational education and training – should be carried out in accordance with the following principles:

- quality assurance policies and procedures should underpin all levels of the European Qualifications Framework,
- quality assurance should be an integral part of the internal management of education and training institutions,
- quality assurance should include regular evaluation of institutions, their programmes or their quality assurance systems by external monitoring bodies or agencies,
- external monitoring bodies or agencies carrying out quality assurance should be subject to regular review,
- quality assurance should include context, input, process and output dimensions, while giving emphasis to outputs and learning outcomes,
- quality assurance systems should include the following elements:
  - clear and measurable objectives and standards, guidelines for implementation, including stakeholder involvement,
  - appropriate resources,
  - consistent evaluation methods, associating self-assessment and external review,
  - feedback mechanisms and procedures for improvement,
  - widely accessible evaluation results,
- quality assurance initiatives at international, national and regional level should be coordinated in order to ensure overview, coherence, synergy and system-wide analysis,
- quality assurance should be a cooperative process across education and training levels and systems, involving all relevant stakeholders, within Member

- States and across the Community, quality assurance orientations at Community level may provide reference points for evaluations and peer learning.

