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# 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>1</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 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<sup>2</sup>; 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.

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<sup>1</sup> ENQA's General Assembly confirmed on 4 November 2004 the change of the former European Network into the European Association.

<sup>2</sup> The term "quality assurance" in this report includes processes such as evaluation, accreditation and audit.

- 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.

**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 ac-