

## Annex III: Ministerial Communiqués and Extracts from the E4 Report

### Berlin Communiqué, 19 September 2003:

They also stress 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.

Therefore, they agree that by 2005 national quality assurance systems should include:

- A definition of the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved.
- Evaluation of programmes or institutions, including internal assessment, external review, participation of students and the publication of results.
- A system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures.
- International participation, co-operation and networking.

At the European level, Ministers call upon ENQA through its members, in co-operation with the EUA, EURASHE and ESIB, to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance, to **explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer review system for quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies** or bodies, and to report back through the Follow-up Group to Ministers in 2005.

### Bergen Communiqué, 20 May 2005:

Almost all countries have made provision for a quality assurance system based on the criteria set out in the Berlin Communiqué and with a high degree of cooperation and networking. However, there is still progress to be made, in particular as regards student involvement and international cooperation. Furthermore, we urge higher education institutions to continue their efforts to enhance the quality of their activities through the systematic introduction of internal mechanisms and their direct correlation to external quality assurance.

**We adopt the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area** as proposed by ENQA. We commit ourselves to introducing the proposed model for peer review of quality assurance agencies on a national basis, while respecting the commonly accepted guidelines and criteria. We **welcome the principle of a European register of quality assurance agencies** based on national review. We ask that the practicalities of implementation be further developed by ENQA in cooperation with EUA, EURASHE and ESIB with a report back to us through the Follow-up Group. We underline the importance of cooperation between nationally recognised agencies with a view to enhancing the mutual recognition of accreditation or quality assurance decisions.

### London Communiqué, 18 May 2007:

The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA adopted in Bergen (ESG) have been a powerful driver of change in relation to quality assurance. All countries have started to implement them and some have made substantial progress. External quality assurance in particular is much better developed than before. The extent of student involvement at all levels has increased since 2005, although improvement is still necessary. Since the main responsibility for quality lies with HEIs, they should continue to develop their systems of quality assurance. We acknowledge the progress made with regard to mutual recognition of accreditation and quality assurance decisions, and encourage continued international cooperation amongst quality assurance agencies.

[...]

We thank the E4 Group for responding to our request to further develop the practicalities of setting up a Register of European Higher Education Quality Assurance Agencies. **The purpose of the register is to allow all stakeholders and the general public open access to objective information about trustworthy quality assurance agencies that are working in line with the ESG.** It will therefore enhance confidence in higher education in the EHEA and beyond, and facilitate the mutual recognition of quality assurance and accreditation decisions. **We welcome the establishment of a register by the E4 group, working in partnership, based on their proposed operational model.** The register will be voluntary, self-financing, independent and transparent. Applications for inclusion on the register should be evaluated on the basis of substantial compliance with the ESG, evidenced through an independent review process endorsed by national authorities, where this endorsement is required by those authorities. We ask the E4 group to report progress to us regularly through BFUG, and to **ensure that after two years of operation, the register is evaluated externally**, taking account of the views of all stakeholders.

### E4 Report to the London Summit (2007)

7. The Register's purpose is to further the development of the European Higher Education Area by creating and managing a Register that will provide clear and reliable information about reliable and trustworthy quality assurance agencies operating in Europe.

8. It is intended as an objective information tool and should not serve any other purpose. To create legitimacy, this important function should be provided using a partnership approach based upon the involvement of all stakeholders in higher education in order to ensure a system of checks and balances.

9. To ensure trust and confidence in the decisions it makes, the Register requires its own independent structure and organisation.

10. The E4 Group proposes **that entry to the Register should be restricted to agencies that meet agreed criteria.** For this purpose, it proposes that **substantial compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) should be the criterion for inclusion in to the Register.** It further proposes that **the evidence required**

for the demonstration of the fulfilment of this criterion shall be contained in a report of an independent review of the agency (normally undertaken on a national basis<sup>1</sup>).

11. ENQA is the representative body for quality assurance agencies at the European level. It has introduced, for the purpose of granting Full membership, its own criteria and procedures which also involve compliance with the ESG and an independent review. It is important that the Register should not duplicate reviews undertaken rigorously, against the same criteria, by ENQA for the purpose of granting full membership of that body. To that end, full membership of ENQA, achieved using the review method described in Annex 5, will normally constitute prima facie evidence for inclusion in the Register.

12. The E4 Group discussed the necessity and purpose of the Register at length. Its considerations were informed, in particular, by the variety of views expressed about the Register in meetings of the BFUG. The Group agreed that the Register could only be justified if it had clear aims and objectives that would be useful and cost-effective. It therefore analysed the possible uses of a Register and identified the following principal aim for it:

The Register should assist in furthering the development of the European Higher Education Area by creating and managing a Register that will provide clear and reliable information about reliable and trustworthy quality assurance agencies operating in Europe.

13. The Register's objectives would be to help to:

- promote student mobility by providing a basis for the increase of trust among higher education institutions
- reduce opportunities for dubious organisations or 'accreditation mills'<sup>2</sup> to gain credibility
- provide a basis for national authorities to authorise higher education institutions to choose any agency from the Register, if that is compatible with national arrangements<sup>3</sup>
- provide a means for higher education institutions to choose between different agencies, if that is compatible with national arrangements<sup>3</sup>
- serve as an instrument to improve the quality of quality assurance agencies and to promote mutual trust amongst them.

14. If the Register is to fulfil these intended purposes, it should be easily accessible and updated as required.

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<sup>1</sup> For this purpose, 'national reviews' and 'reviews carried out on a national basis' are assumed to mean reviews commissioned by the relevant authorities in a EHEA state, but carried out independently from them. For information about national reviews in the context of ENQA membership reviews, see Annex 5.

<sup>2</sup> Accreditation mills are bogus agencies that are usually linked to diploma mills networks. The strategy of these accreditation mills is to gain credibility through the accreditation and evaluation of legitimate higher education institutions or programmes.

<sup>3</sup> Recommendation of the European Parliament and Council on further cooperation in quality assurance in higher education of 15 February 2006 ([http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/lex/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2006/L\\_064/L\\_06420060304en00600062.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/lex/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2006/L_064/L_06420060304en00600062.pdf))