



# **Conclusions of the Tenth Workshop of the European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education (ECA)**

**Barcelona, 12 December 2007**

*Approved by the Consortium, 5<sup>th</sup> June 2008*

## **1. Introduction**

The tenth workshop of the European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education (ECA) was held in Barcelona on 12 December 2007. The ECA Workshop was a short one this time as it was preceded by the ECA dissemination conference in Barcelona on 10 and 11 December. ECA members enjoyed the hospitality of ANECA and Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya.

## **2. Reflection on ECA dissemination conference**

The ECA members perceived the Conference to be successful. This was also heard from other participants and stakeholders. It had been a good opportunity for discussions on mutual recognition and showing the achievements. The international presentations with other approaches to mutual recognition had been very interesting. Crossroads had received a lot of positive comments.

ECA members remarked that a better inclusion of institutions and students, along with ENIC/NARICs, in the work of ECA was desirable. Showing how ECA members can contribute to improving teaching and learning in institutions should get more attention.

Another point of attention was that the implementation of the mutual recognition agreements should be monitored. The fact that in many countries the systems are changing makes it all the more important to track these changes and the influence it could have on the established mutual trust. It was also remarked that ECA should ask itself how it can enlarge the group of agencies that would enter into mutual recognition agreements. Would it be possible to go from bilateral to multilateral mutual recognition agreements? What would be the methodological implications?

It was explained that in the German context the Accreditation Council was the only organisation that could sign mutual recognition agreements. Accredited German agencies have to follow the rules of the Accreditation Council. If accreditation decisions of foreign agencies would be recognised then they could act as German agencies without having the same obligations. Therefore it had, at least for the time being, been decided that German agencies would not enter into mutual recognition agreements in Barcelona. This does not preclude a future solution or the possibility of a German agency cooperating with a foreign agency in e.g. a joint accreditation procedure.

Furthermore, it was remarked that ECA should reflect on how it could relate to professional accreditation agencies. The funding of agencies could also be an interesting topic for future surveys and discussions.

### 3. Organisational issues

The Conclusions of the Berlin Workshop, the annual financial report 2006 as audited by KPMG, and the financial forecast for 2007 were approved. The Consortium approved the recommendations of the ECA Management Group with regard to compliance of ECA members to the ECA Code of Good Practice. The Management Group had based its recommendations on the following grounds:

1. The composition of the external evaluation panels. The experts in the panel should be independent and inclusion of international experts is strongly recommended.
2. External evaluations that had taken place resulting into final reports.
3. A positive outcome of the evaluation, i.e. substantial compliance to the standards of the Code.

This resulted in the following conclusions on compliance to the ECA Code:

<i>ECA member</i>	<i>External evaluation in</i>	<i>Evaluation report published</i>	<i>Conclusion of ECA</i>
<b>AAC</b>	June 2007	16 November 2007	Compliant
<b>FHR</b>	Sept 2007	15 November 2007 (German version)	Compliant
<b>CTI</b>	Sept 2007	28 November 2007	Compliant
<b>ACQUIN</b>	2006 (AR)	December 2006	Compliant
<b>AHPGS</b>	2009 (AR)		Waiting for external evaluation report
<b>AR</b>	February 2008	June 2008	Waiting for external evaluation report
<b>AQAS</b>	2007 (AR)	March 2007	Waiting for AR confirmation of compliance
<b>FIBAA</b>	2007 (AR)	March 2007	Compliant
<b>ZEVA</b>	2006 (AR)	June 2006	Compliant
<b>HETAC</b>	March 2006	Sept 2006	Compliant
<b>NOKUT</b>	2007	29 February 2008	Waiting for external evaluation report
<b>NVAO</b>	June 2007	November 2007	Compliant
<b>PKA</b>	2008		Waiting for external evaluation report
<b>ANECA</b>	June 2007	27 Sept 2007	Compliant
<b>OAQ</b>	May 2006	August 2006	Compliant

### 4. ECA after 2007

There was wide agreement that ECA had been successful. Most members want to continue with ECA after 2007. A few members were in doubt and ACQUIN announced that it would step out of ECA. At the conference some agencies had shown interest in joining ECA. With regard to the paper on ECA after 2007 and the new draft Agreement of Cooperation the following remarks were made by members:

- Mutual recognition of accreditation and quality assurance decisions should be the main aim. It should be explored how mutual recognition can reach the political level.
- Some doubt was expressed about the feasibility of the aim of mutual recognition of accreditation decisions since most agreements focussed on accreditation results instead of decisions.
- Mutual recognition could not be reached by everyone and should not be the only aim. Other aims or topics that were specifically mentioned included:
  - Platform for methodological exchange
  - Institutional audits
  - Professional accreditation
  - Quality labels
  - Learning outcomes
- The formulation of a second aim for ECA should be stronger and more specified. However, the broadening of ECA could blur the focus of ECA.
- Many members mentioned that the learning experiences in ECA had been very beneficial and that it was necessary to continue this.
- Many members felt that the new ECA project should be limited in time (3-4 years was explicitly mentioned).

It was concluded that the draft Agreement of Cooperation would be revised taking into account these remarks. The new Agreement would be signed by those members who would be willing to join the new ECA in Poland in June 2008. A limited number of other accreditation or accreditation-like agencies could join ECA then. In the meantime the current organisational arrangements will remain in place in accordance with the Córdoba Agreement.

## **5. Short update on ECA Working groups**

Working group 1 had not met since preparing the mutual recognition agreements. It would have a task in overseeing the implementation and possible extension of the agreements.

Working group 2 is elaborating on the principles for the accreditation of joint programmes. A specific challenge is to apply the principles and involve members and non-members who have not signed mutual recognition agreements.

Working group 3 was focusing on the delivery of data to Qrossroads. A training day had been scheduled for January 2008. A question arising from the TEAM Steering Group was whether Qrossroads will be open to non-ECA members. The Consortium decided that for 2008 Qrossroads would be limited to the current participants in the TEAM project. For the second half of 2008 new ECA members (who will sign the new Agreement of Cooperation in Poland) will be invited to join Qrossroads. A decision on the possible extension of Qrossroads with non-ECA members will be made in 2009.

Working group 4 presented two papers. One paper contained a typology of institutional accreditation and institutional audit. There are differences, e.g. institutional accreditation is more focused on accountability and has a clear outcome (yes/no/conditional decision). Institutional audit is mainly about quality improvement and leads to recommendations for improvement (with strengths and weaknesses identified). However, in reality the differences seem to be small and gradually fading. The terminology is not always clear and a closer look (by a separate Working group) would be beneficial.

A second paper of Working group 4 dealt with statements on student learning outcomes. Although these statements met some agreement a further look on learning outcomes would be needed. The development of an agreed concept of learning outcomes and defining ways for the testing of student learning outcomes was also desired.