



Conclusions of the Third Workshop of the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA)

Bergen, 13-15 June 2004

1. Introduction

The third workshop of the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA) was held in Bergen from 13-15 June 2004. Twelve accreditation organisations from eight European countries were very generously received by the Nasjonalt organ for kvalitet i utdanningen (NOKUT). The list of participants is included in Annex 1.

The participants were welcomed by the Director of NOKUT and the Chairman of ECA. It was emphasised that real progress was made by the different working groups. The importance of the activities of ECA for the establishment of the European Higher Education Area were acknowledged in the official addresses by the representative of the Norwegian Deputy Minister of Education and Research, and by the Chairman of NOKUT.

It was agreed that this workshop would focus on the presentation of activities and discussion of the submitted documents by the five ECA working groups. Further decisions should be taken at the next workshop on 2-3 December 2004 in Zürich. The papers for this workshop will be sent early November.

2. Organisational issues

The following decisions were taken with regard to the organisation of ECA:

- The Conclusions of the workshop in Cordóba were accepted by the Consortium.
- The retirement of Ton Vroeijenstijn and his succession by Mark Frederiks as ECA Coordinator was explained and confirmed by the Consortium. The participants expressed their gratitude for Ton's valuable contribution to ECA.
- The proposal of the management group for different types of membership was accepted with the following amendments:
 - Point 1, last sentence: the word "professional" will be deleted because the German accreditation system has no professional accreditation. The reference to FIBAA will also be deleted.
 - Point 3: the use of the Code of Good Practice for membership purposes was endorsed. The implications will be further discussed in Zürich.
 - Point 5: it was agreed that the Chair of the Central and Eastern European Network (CEEN) will be invited as observer for the workshop in Zürich.
 - Point 6: The management group will, in consultation with the Chairs of the working groups, invite some representatives of CEEN for participation in the working groups.

- The issue of the membership applications needed further discussion and was therefore postponed to the workshop in Zürich.
- The proposal of the management group for the evaluation of ECA at the end of 2004 was accepted with the following amendments:
 - The questionnaire should not be multiple choice (yes/no); there should be opportunity for comments.
 - An eight point with an overall impression and appreciation of the achievements made (is it fruitful to continue with ECA?) should be included.
- The contacts with other organisations, such as the Bologna Follow Up Group, European Commission, ENQA, Joint Quality Initiative have been established and should be strengthened further. In addition to these organisations, observers from CEEN and ENIC/NARICs could be invited as well in Zürich. An overview of developments in CEEN showed that real progress is made. It was noted that the ENQA meeting in Frankfurt will be quite important. Discussion among ECA members with regard to ENQA will be useful but this should not result in the perception of “two blocks” within ENQA.

A full financial statement will be submitted to the Consortium in Zürich.

3. Output of the working groups

Working Group 1: Mutual recognition

The following documents were discussed:

1. The Code of Good Practice. It was felt that the Code is applicable. With regard to appeals a distinction can be made between process appeals and appeals regarding accreditation decisions. This can be interpreted within each national context. Each ECA member was asked to send in comments on the Code before September 15. The Code will then be revised and prepared for commitment of members in Zürich. There was discussion on the desirable time line for implementation. Full compliance cannot be expected from every member on the short term. A plan for implementation of the Code will be presented in Zürich.
2. Survey on legal frameworks and consequences of mutual recognition. It was agreed that the survey was very useful and the preliminary results promising. However, the answers were sometimes confusing and the questions seemed to be interpreted in different ways. Karena Maguire will follow up on the questionnaire and seek for clarification of the answers of each organisation. The full report, including an action plan, will be presented in Zürich.
3. Experiences with observing or participating in procedures of other ECA members. It was agreed that mutual observation and participation is useful for both learning from each other and enhancing trust. A few examples will be presented in Zürich. A practical proposal for promoting mutual observation and participation will be presented as well.
4. The discussion on the proposal for an ECA expert pool showed that the idea of an expert pool was welcomed but that the way in which this may be achieved needs further elaboration. The following remarks were made:
 - a. In some countries the establishment of a database with experts might conflict with privacy and data protection regulations.
 - b. Some ECA members, particularly in Germany, do not publish the names of experts. The German Accreditation Council does not require this.

- c. The criteria for inclusion in the pool should be elaborated. Attention should be paid to the quality of experts. The best experts will probably be very busy.
- d. The fees that are paid for experts vary. It would be worthwhile to make an inventory of the range of fees paid to experts.
- e. Some participants advocated that member organisations contact each other for experts by telephone or e-mail instead of setting up a formal pool.

These remarks will be considered by the working group and a new proposal will be submitted in Zürich.

Working group 2: The European Qualifications Framework

An overview of developments and activities was presented. The ECA paper on the European Qualifications Framework was clarified and discussed by the participants. An invitation to discuss this paper was received from the Bologna Follow Up Group. Initiatives such as of Joint Quality Initiative, AEL/ELIA, the Socrates Thematic Networks, and a Dutch research project by Trudy Rexwinkel were mentioned (cf. Powerpoint presentation Angelika Schade). There was agreement that the working group should focus now on the elaboration of the Dublin descriptors for accreditation purposes. An inventory of the handling of these Dublin descriptors within ECA countries should be made. The focus should be on the bachelor and master level (first and second cycle) and not on the doctoral level (third cycle) or on education outside of higher education. Best practices should be presented in Zürich. This will hopefully lead to a situation in which the Dublin descriptors can be used in a better way for accreditation purposes. That will enhance the transparency of bachelor and master degrees in Europe and in this way contribute to the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework.

Working group 3: The Accreditation Report Supplement

A revised draft of the accreditation report supplement was presented and discussed. It emerged from the discussion that there was no agreement yet on implementation of this supplement. Further consultation with the ENIC/NARIC network would be useful. The question was raised how the supplement relates to the diploma supplement. Some participants doubted the added value of the supplement. It was argued that the necessary information can be found on the websites of ECA members. On the other hand it was noted that an accreditation decision supplement would provide concise information in a single format that could not be obtained easily by searching through websites. The OECD/UNESCO initiative to set up a world-wide database with accredited institutions and programmes shows that there is a need for such information. There was agreement that, if a supplement would be implemented, it should not exceed one page. It was concluded that the management group will look at what is already available on the different websites and present a new proposal in Zürich.

Working group 4: On the Way to Bergen 2005

The paper "Basic Principles of Accreditation in Higher Education" was presented and discussed. It was explained that this paper had to be translated quickly from German to English. This might have caused some textual errors. The paper was discussed section by section and the remarks of participants were noted by the Chair. The following general remarks were made:

- The D-A-CH members have put a lot of effort in the first drafts of the paper. But once revised and adopted by the Consortium the paper is an ECA paper which means that the references to the D-A-CH network should be deleted.
- The recommendations should be more focused and addressed to the Ministers. This means that the recommendations section has to be rewritten.
- ECA should strive for co-operation with ENQA. The first preference is not a separate ECA paper but a joint ENQA/ECA contribution to the meeting of the Ministers.
- In order to influence the decision-making within ENQA it is important that the revised paper is forwarded to ENQA members very soon. Of course it should be emphasised that the paper reflects the present state of discussion within ECA.

The final paper needs to be ready for decision-making in Zürich.

Working group 5: New Developments in Accreditation

The results of the first meeting of the working group and an overview of national accreditation systems were presented. The Consortium agreed with the proposal of the working group to:

- Compare and analyse different (institutional and programme) approaches with a view on relationships and developing hypotheses;
- Describe new developments such as output assessment, GATS and cross-border education, also outside Europe;
- Analyse the relationship between national and international accreditation, and between academic and professional accreditation.

There was also agreement on the proposed working methods (cf. Powerpoint presentation Rolf Heusser).

4. The next workshop

OAQ (Switzerland) will host the 4th workshop on 2 and 3 December 2004 in Zürich. It is clear that this will be a very important meeting in which decisions need to be made on the Code of Good Practice, the Bergen paper, ECA membership, and the evaluation of ECA. The Consortium trusts that this will happen in the same nice and hospitable atmosphere as in Bergen.