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european consortium for accreditation

Conclusions of the Fourth Workshop of the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA)

Zürich, 2-3 December 2004

1. Introduction

The fourth workshop of the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA) was held in Zürich from 2-3 December 2004. ECA members and invited experts and speakers were very generously received by the Organ für Akkreditierung und Qualitätssicherung der Schweizerischen Hochschulen (OAQ).

The participants were welcomed by Rolf Heusser, the Director of OAQ. Oddvar Haugland explained on behalf of the management group that Loek Vredevoogd, Chairman of ECA, could not be present because of medical reasons. It was proposed and accepted by the Consortium that Rolf Heusser would act as Chair of the workshop sessions.

2. Organisational issues

The Conclusions of the Bergen workshop were formally approved by the Consortium.

It was announced that the next workshop will take place on 1-3 June 2005 in Dublin. The Austrian members are prepared to organise the December workshop in Vienna. This offer was gratefully accepted.

Loek Vredevoogd will step down as Chairman of ECA. The management group proposed Rolf Heusser as new Chairman of ECA. The following composition of the management group was proposed and unanimously agreed for 2005:
- Rolf Heusser, Chairman of ECA
- Karl Dittrich, member
- Oddvar Haugland, member
- Francisco Marcellán, member
- Seamus Purseil, member
- Mark Frederiks, ECA Coordinator

It was agreed that it would be beneficial if the organisers of the next workshop would become part of the management group, at least for the time period until the next workshop. However, a proposal for a more structural approach to the composition of the management group will be proposed in Dublin.

The Budget 2004 was unanimously accepted after clarification that the costs for the working groups are restricted to costs for meeting rooms and lunches.
The Budget 2005 was accepted after clarification that some of the costs for pilot projects could be deduced from the reserve for 2004 and 2005. However, this should be decided after the proposals for the pilot projects are clear.

It was decided that all new members should pay the full fee of 5,000 euro, also if they would join ECA later in the year. A reduced membership fee for possible applications from Central and Eastern European agencies should not be ruled out.

There were four applications for ECA membership. The management group advised to postpone a decision on ASIIN membership until inner-German consensus about the application could be secured. This proposal was endorsed by the Consortium. With regard to IEI the management group advised to decide negatively on membership. In the discussion it was said that ECA is not a Consortium of professional accreditation organisations. The Consortium decided that IEI could not become a member of ECA.
The management group recommended the members to decide positively on membership of AHPGS. The Consortium decided unanimously to grant ECA membership to AHPGS.
With regard to the application of CTI the management group recommended the members to decide positively. From the discussion it emerged that there remained certain questions which asked for clarification. The proposal was made to accept CTI conditionally as new member and to mandate the management group to clarify the remaining questions and take the final decision on membership of CTI. This proposal was accepted unanimously.

With regard to the future membership of ECA the question was asked whether ECA should enlarge (and increase its influence) or not. The management group advocated a double strategy. On the one hand ECA should not seek new members actively. This implies that ECA would remain small, thereby maintaining its speed, but without closing the door for applicants. On the other hand ECA would have to be more active in disseminating its results, and establishing and maintaining contacts internationally. The discussion among members revealed support for this approach. However, several members said that ECA should not be seen as an "elite-group from Western Europe". Membership should be open for applicants from Central and Eastern Europe. The proposal was made to open up one workshop per year for interested organisations outside of ECA. It was agreed that the management group would propose a communication and dissemination strategy in Dublin.

The survey results of the 2004 interim of evaluation of ECA were presented (cf. Annex "Evaluation of ECA 2004"). The results were agreed upon and also recognised by members who did not respond to the survey. It was decided unanimously that ECA should continue.

3. Code of Good Practice

The standards of the Code will have to be implemented by ECA members by the end of 2006. In 2007 there will be an external evaluation. It was agreed that the external evaluation should preferably be combined with evaluations for ENQA and national reviews (e.g. the "Reakkreditierung" by the Akkreditierungsrat and national reviews in other countries). Proposals for both the implementation and the external evaluation will be presented in Dublin.
The Code was agreed upon unanimously. AQAS has announced in a letter that they were not able to come to Zürich to sign the Code. But the assurance is made that the Code is regarded as a definite commitment by AQAS. The Code was signed by the representatives of the other 11 ECA members. Future members (including AHPGS and CTI) would also need to sign the Code, in addition to the Agreement of Cooperation.

4. ECA report for Bergen 2005

Nearly all ECA members were satisfied with the content of the ECA report for the meeting of the ministers in Bergen. Some suggestions for improvements were made. The report was approved by the Consortium taking these modifications into account and after a final check on language.

The strategy for disseminating the paper was discussed. In particular it was discussed whether the ECA report should be sent to the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG) separately by ECA or jointly with the ENQA paper. It was concluded that it would be preferred if ENQA would include the ECA report in the ENQA submission to the BFUG. If ENQA would not be willing to do this then ECA should send its report separately to the BFUG. In any case, the ECA report should be disseminated to the national ministries and the international networks (ESIB, EURASHE, CEEN, UNICE, ENIC/NARICs, etc.).

5. Presentations by guest speakers

Three guest speakers gave interesting lectures about the future of European accreditation from the viewpoint of the European Commission (Guy Haug), CHEPS scenarios (Don Westerheijden), and the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies (CEEN; Milan Sojka). The three presentations are attached as Annexes.

Guy Haug called on ECA members to endorse the proposed Recommendations from the European Commission. In the discussion it emerged that there were doubts about some aspects of the recommendations, in particular with regard to the Register. The proposed free choice of institutions for any European agency in the Register would be in conflict with the carefully designed national accreditation systems. Options for ECA to apply for Socrates (or Tempus) programmes were also briefly discussed.

The presentation of scenarios by Don Westerheijden made it clear that most ECA members favoured the Octavia scenario and also thought that this scenario would be most likely to occur. The Centralia and Vitis Vinifera scenarios were seen as most desirable from a student perspective (but there were many abstentions).

The presentation by Milan Sojka made it clear that CEEN membership is very diverse. Agencies from Hungary and the Czech and Slowak Republic, followed later on by Poland, constitute an experienced core within the network. ECA members expressed their interest in the recent publication on CEEN members.

6. Working group 1 "Mutual recognition"

The survey on legal frameworks for accreditation and implications for future mutual recognition agreements was very useful. However, it also raised many new questions while a certain survey fatigue could be seen among members. Therefore, two principal actions were proposed and endorsed by the Consortium: making accreditation profiles for each member and starting pilot projects on mutual recognition.

The accreditation profile:
- Would be a standard template for all member organisations
- Containing Vital statistics - information gathered by surveys to date
- Agreed version to be populated centrally – WG1
- Validated / verified by member organisations
- Held on members section of the ECA website.

HETAC and NVAO will start with making these accreditation profiles for their organisations. These profiles will be discussed and decided upon in Dublin. The accreditation profiles for other members will be made after Dublin.

The pilot projects on mutual recognition:
- Would contain two partners per project – no limit on number of projects
- 3 types of project: Institutional, Programme and Mixed
- Submissions in writing to ECA Coordinator
- Preferences indicated: programme or institutional; level and type of qualification; field of study

The outline for the programme and institutional pilot projects should be proposed and presented in Dublin. The mixed pilot project could follow later.

With regard to the paper on "Selection criteria and procedures for experts" the following remarks were made:
- A discussion emerged on the necessity of experts from abroad vs. international expertise
- The list should be rearranged
- It was not clear whether there could be one list for both programme and institutional accreditors or whether there should be two lists.

It was decided that comments should be given to Elisabeth Fiorioli by the end of January. In Dublin a new proposal will be discussed and agreed upon.

The survey on "Mapping cooperations in ECA" was endorsed by the Consortium. An inventory of mutual cooperations and examples of "good practices" will be presented in Dublin.

7. Working group 2 "European Qualifications Framework"

Presentations were made by Angelika Schade and Trudy Rexwinkel (cf. Annex). It was decided that working group 2 will report in Dublin on its progress on the following issues:
- Following the work on the European Qualifications Framework, in particular the implications for accreditation;
- A proposal on the role of the Dublin descriptors and an inventory of any legal obstacles for mutual recognition in accreditation frameworks;
- Clarification on the role of the Dublin descriptors in joint degree programmes.

8. Working group 3 "Information tool for accreditation decisions"

Two options were presented. One option would be to continue with the format for accreditation decisions as presented in the accompanying paper. This would mean that each ECA member commits itself to translate each accreditation decision according to the format. This was perceived to be very costly in terms of time and effort. The second option would be to provide a search engine for accreditations on the ECA website and to link this to the lists of accreditation decisions on the websites of each ECA member. This second option had the preference of the Consortium. It was decided that an inventory of accreditation decisions on websites of ECA members and a proposal for an information tool through a search engine on the ECA website would be presented in Dublin.

9. Working group 5 "New developments in accreditation"

The two accompanying papers were discussed. Members were critical about the Harvey/Newton paper. A list with advantages and disadvantages of institutional and programme accreditations was discussed. Scenarios for the use of institutional and programme approaches will be discussed in Dublin. The working group will also present in Dublin overviews of new developments in the USA and with regard to guidelines of UNESCO/OECD.

10. Closure

The workshop ended with the formal signing procedure of the Code of Good Practice followed by a photo session and a reception. Participants perceived this as a very pleasant ending of a successful workshop thanks to the efficiency and hospitality of OAQ.

11. Summary of actions for the Dublin workshop

The following actions should be taken and the results presented at the next workshop on 1-3 June 2005 in Dublin:

Management group
- Proposal for a structural approach to the composition of the management group
- Recommendation on a possible ECA contribution to the costs of pilot projects from the reserves of ECA
- Recommendations on new membership applications (if any), including the pending application of ASIIN
- Proposal for an international ECA communication and dissemination strategy

Working group 1
- Plan of each ECA member for the implementation of the standards of the Code before the end of 2006
- Proposal for the external evaluation of compliance to the Code in 2007
- Accreditation profiles of HETAC and NVAO to be presented in Dublin and agreement on the outline of the accreditation profiles for all members
- Outline for a pilot project on mutual recognition between two programme accreditors and a pilot project on mutual recognition between two institutional accreditors
- New proposal on "Selection criteria and procedures for experts" for agreement in Dublin
- Inventory of mutual cooperations and examples of "good practices"

Working group 2
- Following the work on the European Qualifications Framework, in particular the implications for accreditation
- A proposal on the role of the Dublin descriptors and an inventory of any legal obstacles for mutual recognition in accreditation frameworks
- Clarification on the role of the Dublin descriptors in joint degree programmes

Working group 3
- Inventory of accreditation decisions on websites of ECA members
- Proposal for an information tool on accreditation decisions through a search engine on the ECA website

Working group 4
The working group has delivered the ECA report for Bergen. The management group will need to decide on a new task for this working group.

Working group 5
- Scenarios for the use of institutional and programme approaches
- Overviews of new developments in the USA and with regard to the guidelines of UNESCO/OECD

12. List of Annexes

- Evaluation of ECA 2004
- Presentation Guy Haug
- Presentation Don Westerheijden
- Presentation Milan Sojka
- Presentation Trudy Rexwinkel