



Conclusions of the Twelfth Workshop of the European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education (ECA)

Zürich, 11-12 June 2009

1. Introduction

The twelfth workshop of the European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education (ECA) was held in Zürich on 11 and 12 June 2009. ECA members enjoyed the hospitality of the Center of Accreditation and Quality Assurance of the Swiss Universities (OAQ). After the ECA Business meeting the delegates were welcomed by Martina Weiss, Secretary general of the Swiss University Conference. An inspiring guest lecture on developments in the last decade of accreditation and quality assurance was held by Nick Harris, UK Bologna expert and HE consultant (former director of QAA). This was followed by an introduction to the Workshop by Rolf Heusser, Chairperson of ECA.

2. ECA Business Meeting

The Conclusions of the Kraków Workshop were approved by the Consortium.

The Management Group recommended to approve the membership application of the Council for Higher Education of the Republic of Slovenia. A delegation of 3 members of the Management Group had visited the agency and held meetings with the management and staff, and the group visited the Ministry of Education too. The drafted new law on higher education and the emergence of the successor agency to the Council were clarified. The Management Group concluded that the membership criteria would be fulfilled once the external review of the agency would have been positively concluded. The Consortium decided to admit the Council for Higher Education of the Republic of Slovenia as new ECA member with the remark that the application would be reviewed again if the external review would be cancelled or the result would be negative.

Requests for accreditation and participation in European projects were discussed. It was decided that requests addressed to ECA for accreditation or participation in projects would be sent to ECA members who could then decide whether they would like to join such initiatives. It was also decided that there would be no ECA label in the near future. In case of capacity-building initiatives it would be possible to cooperate between ECA members. In such cases an open call to all ECA members could be sent.

Possible topics for the ECA Seminar in December 2009 which NVAO was willing to organise were discussed. The seminar would focus on informing each other about changes and a planned initiative on assessing internationalisation.

The Consortium approved the ECA budget for 2009 and an annual membership fee of 3,000 euro. After discussion it was concluded that in both 2009 and 2010 this membership fee could be collected.

The meeting concluded with feedback from members on recent changes in their systems.

3. Working groups

All Working groups presented their Work plan for the new year. These work plans would be revised, collected and edited into a single ECA Work plan 2009-2010.

Working group 1 on Mutual recognition and joint programmes presented a new draft of the cooperation map which stated the cooperation activities between members. In addition, the results of a questionnaire with regard to the implementation of mutual recognition agreements was presented. Although ECA members were very positive about the effect of mutual recognition activities on international cooperation, it was also clear that the implementation of the agreements was still limited. Two examples of a simplified procedures because of a mutual recognition agreement were presented. Moreover, it was argued that mutual recognition would be particularly beneficial in the case of joint programmes. Lastly, from the ENIC-NARIC viewpoint it was stated that the mutual recognition activities serve as the bridge that connects the worlds of accreditation and recognition.

Working group 2 presented a set of recommendations that would facilitate the mutual recognition of "institutional evaluations" (accreditations, audits, assessments). These recommendations were adopted by the Consortium. The recommendations were based on a survey among agencies with regard to institutional accreditations and audits. In addition, the outcomes of a conference on private higher education organised by ÖAR with the support of ECA were presented, together with the results of a survey among private HE institutions and agencies with regard to private higher education. Finally, the EU funding proposal E-STEP on the training of experts was presented.

Working group 3 presented the TEAM II project and Qrossroads. A question was asked about the inclusion of learning outcomes in Qrossroads. This would be further discussed at a WG 3/Qrossroads administrators meeting in September 2009.

Working group 4 presented the results of a survey, and presented the state of the art on learning outcomes. The discussion on principles for the inclusion of learning outcomes in accreditation procedures led to a revised report.