

Conclusions of the Workshop “Towards a European Consortium for Accreditation”

On 12 and 13 June 2003, a workshop on the establishment of a European Consortium for Accreditation was organised at the initiative of the Netherlands Accreditation Organisation (NAO). Twelve accreditation organisations from eight countries participated.

From this workshop a broad consensus emerged that European accreditation organisations would benefit mutually from cooperating with each other and that there are specific common issues within the framework of accreditation that should be addressed fairly quickly, particularly the issue of joint degrees.

It was concluded that a consortium is an appropriate tool to strengthen the collaboration among organisations responsible for accreditation in the higher education sector. The ultimate aim of the consortium would be the achievement of mutual recognition of accreditation decisions between its members. Moreover, accreditation organisations, through aimed work on issues related to recognition of higher education, can provide a useful contribution to the progressive elaboration of the European Higher Education Area.

The proposed draft document “Towards a European Consortium for Accreditation” was acknowledged as providing a very useful starting point. However, the following points were also made:

- The consortium must not aim at promoting accreditation as the only instrument for quality assurance in higher education.
- The new consortium must collaborate proactively with other organisations and initiatives, such as ENQA, Joint Quality Initiative and ENIC/ NARIC.
- The consortium must have an open structure, to allow other accreditation organisations to join in at later stages, provided they share the consortium's objectives.

Formalising the Consortium

To establish a viable and effective consortium, a charter or mission statement has to be elaborated based on the founding organisations' commitment to tackle concrete problems related to the use of accreditation in higher education.

To prepare the formalising of the consortium, a **task group** with the following members was formed:

- Loek Vredevoogd (NAO, the Netherlands), Chair
- Seamus Purseil, (HETAC, Ireland)
- Tove Blytt Holmen (NOKUT, Norway)
- Rolf Heusser (OAQ, Switzerland)
- Lluís Ferrer (ANECA, Spain)

Ton Vroeijenstijn (NAO, the Netherlands) will act as coordinator.

The mandate of the task group is to:

- formulate proposals for the consortium's structure, management and funding;
- propose a charter or mission statement based on the above elements. The founding organisations can formally sign it at the consortium's next meeting, as well as new members at a later stage.

The task group's proposals will be presented at the consortium's next meeting, to be organised in Cordoba in November 2003.

The working groups

The workshop singled out three topics for the consortium's immediate attention and decided to set up working groups to start addressing these issues, with the intention of presenting preliminary results at the consortium's next meeting:

- A group on **mutual recognition** is chaired by Olchert Brouwer (NAO, the Netherlands) and is asked to work towards a clear definition of the concept of 'mutual recognition' and analyse its function in the gradual creation of a European Higher Education Area, taking national legislation into account. The analysis should seek to clarify the position of accreditation in the overall picture of transnational recognition within the European area.
- A second group is chaired by Angelika Schade (Akkreditierungsrat, Germany) and is given the task of dealing with the issue of a **European Qualifications Framework**. Its aim is to further develop the Dublin descriptors, to propose a methodology to specify these descriptors for specific domains or degree programmes and to develop the concept of international benchmarking within the accreditation process.
- The third working group, chaired by Ton Vroeijenstijn (NAO, the Netherlands), will work on enhancing the **international transparency of accreditation decisions**. The group is asked to develop a template to be used to standardise the information contained in the national accreditation reports and decisions and propose a methodology to produce and disseminate this information on an intra-European and international scale.

The next meeting will be organised in Cordoba in November 2003, hosted by ANECA (Spain). In addition to formalising the consortium, the meeting will discuss the preliminary results of the three working groups and their aims and schedules for the remainder of their work.