Chapter 5
International Quality Assurance and Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education: Europe

by

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This chapter aims to describe and analyse the national systems of quality assurance, accreditation and recognition of qualifications in higher education in European countries. It focuses on the countries participating in the Bologna Process, a European-wide reform effort whose aim is to move national higher education systems towards comparability. Furthermore, it provides an overview of the national frameworks for the recognition of qualifications in Europe, including the UNESCO/Council of Europe Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications (Lisbon Recognition Convention).

5.1. Introduction

Europe and higher education

This chapter aims to clarify Europe's systems of quality assurance and accreditation and the frameworks for the recognition of qualifications in higher education (ISCED[1] levels 5 and 6). In addition, it focuses on the countries participating in the Bologna Process, a European-wide reform effort whose aim is to move national higher education systems towards convergence and comparability. At present, 40 countries are involved, including Russia since September 2003.

Identity and diversity in European higher education

Despite the converging forces of European integration, internationalisation and globalisation, higher education remains very much a national competence. The nation-state is the main level of educational policy making in Europe with the states playing the major role in both education and education policy. National sovereignty and diversity are thus the

1. International Standard Classification of Education.

characteristic features of Europe's higher education. However, certain forces are affecting national governments' position in higher education policy. Greater institutional autonomy and deregulation have already resulted in more decentralised policy making. Countries like the United Kingdom have a long-standing tradition of local educational policy. In France and Spain, where the central government has long played the principal role, regional governments are now taking a greater part in policy decisions. In Belgium, on the other hand, all authority now lies at the regional level. As a result, decentralisation and regionalism are rendering higher education systems in Europe even more diverse.

Co-operation and convergence

At the same time, there are trends towards comparability and compatibility. In the field of education, the European Union's competence is restricted to "contributing to the development of quality education by encouraging co-operation between member states" (Article 149 of the EU Treaty). Nonetheless, through various instruments and policies the European Union increasingly affects national educational policies. There are its well-known mobility and co-operation programmes, such as SOCRATES-ERASMUS and LEONARDO, which have promoted the European dimension of higher education since the mid-1980s. However, its strongest influence on higher education does not lie in the realm of education policies in the narrow sense but is due to legally binding Directives on professional recognition for an increasing number of professions. More recently, the EU's ambitious goal of becoming the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, agreed at the Lisbon European Council in March 2000, provides a basis for action in the field of higher education, as education is a key factor in reaching that goal. Other declarations, strategic objectives and benchmarks formulated by European Council of Ministers' meetings in recent years have also set the agenda for reform in European education and training. The so-called "open method of co-ordination" allows the European Union to take educational initiatives, even in the absence of formal legal competence, to realise such strategic missions. This means of political co-operation between member states to achieve common strategic objectives has revealed itself to be a very important policy instrument, allowing the European Commission to develop new co-operative measures and initiatives.

Although the European Commission did not initiate the Bologna Process, it is now taking an important role in what is the most important reform process in European higher education. Following an initiative of the French, German, British and Italian Education Ministers at the Sorbonne in 1998, the Bologna Process started formally as a Declaration signed by some

30 European Education Ministers in Bologna in June 1999. The Bologna Declaration calls for the creation of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010 and lists a range of actions to be undertaken by signatory states. The most important action lines are the adoption of a common two-cycle system of degrees based on the undergraduate/graduate model, the further development of a common credit system, co-operation in the field of quality assurance and elimination of all remaining obstacles to mobility. The Bologna Process has its own follow-up instruments, most notably the biennial ministerial conferences (Prague 2001, Berlin 2003, Bergen 2005), which monitor progress made by the signatory states in realising their voluntary commitments and take new initiatives. Policies that support comparability and compatibility and voluntary co-operation towards shared strategic goals within a common policy framework are characteristic of both the Bologna and the Lisbon processes (Van der Wende, 2003). The two processes are mutually reinforcing and set the standards for several other action programmes in the field of education and elsewhere. The current and future impact of these processes on the convergence of European higher education systems is potentially important. In 2002, the European Union initiated the Bruges-Copenhagen process to enhance co-operation in the field of vocational education and training (VET). One of its aims is to arrive at synergy with the Bologna Process in important areas such as transparency, recognition and quality assurance.

The impetus for reform and convergence of the Bologna, Lisbon and Bruges-Copenhagen processes also underpins developments in the field of quality assurance, accreditation and recognition of qualifications in European tertiary education. In fact, quality assurance is a crucial element of the Bologna Process, as the Berlin ministerial conference in September 2003 made clear. Progress in this area will be critical for the overall success of the Bologna Process.

Characteristics of European higher education

Core values

The process of convergence in European higher education builds on existing communalities. Several important statements and texts, such as the *Magna Charta Universitatum*, signed by European university rectors in 1988, or, more recently, the Graz Declaration, issued by the European University Association (EUA) on the occasion of the Graz Convention of higher education institutions in 2003, refer to essential aspects in European higher education: the view that higher education is and remains a public responsibility, the link between the autonomy of institutions and their public accountability, the importance attached to open and democratic access on

the basis of merit and equal opportunity, the striving towards high academic quality, and the important social and cultural role of higher education institutions. Together with a growing awareness of the crucial role and responsibility of higher education in building modern knowledge-based societies and democracies, these considerations form the basis for co-operation and comparability in European higher education.

The role of the state and private provision

In most European countries, public policy gives the state a central role in regulating, funding and monitoring the system of higher education. Public higher education laws usually constitute the main regulatory framework for national higher education systems. The state – whether the national or regional government – usually recognises institutions and programmes operating within its territory and the diplomas/degrees awarded. The precise mechanisms and procedures differ, from almost automatic recognition to licensing on the basis of an accreditation process or the granting of legal powers to award degrees. Institutions are generally publicly funded to a large extent, although in many countries the percentage of institutional budgets derived from public sources is shrinking, and institutions are increasingly encouraged to obtain additional resources from research, consultancy and the educational market. European higher education institutions often have a public status, which may however take different forms and have very different consequences. Sometimes institutions and their personnel are part of the state apparatus; sometimes they are outside the public sector, but their personnel enjoy the same benefits as civil servants. Other arrangements also exist: in the United Kingdom, institutions are independent higher education corporations and appoint and reward their own staff.

This does not imply that there is no space for private higher education in Europe. In some central and eastern European countries, it is the fastest-growing sector of provision. However, the term "private" has no less than four possible meanings.

First, several countries, mainly historically Catholic ones, include the principle of "freedom of education" in their constitution or legal framework, thereby allowing the Church and other religious or philosophical bodies to establish and run schools and universities. Such institutions are not established by public authorities but are similar to public institutions in many respects: they receive comparable funding, their degrees are recognised by the state and have an equal status and validity, and their personnel sometimes enjoy the same benefits as public servants. Their

inclusion in the public higher education system can be justified from a functional point of view.

Second, the word "private" may mean "non-public". In central and eastern Europe especially, legal reform opened the national higher education system to institutions founded by other than public bodies. Generally, these institutions are recognised, accredited or licensed by the state in one way or another, but do not have to comply with all regulations. From a functional point of view, they do not fall completely within the "public" higher education system.

Third, "private" may mean "for profit". Although many public institutions do generate income on the market to overcome declining state funding, they cannot be viewed as "for-profit" organisations. While the usual mission of higher education institutions in Europe is not to generate profit, for-profit institutions and educational services are active in Europe. For example, many UK public institutions operate as "private" organisations abroad and/or set up separate legal entities to exploit the benefits of research and consultancy. The advent of for-profit institutions in Europe and the commercialisation of higher education are widely debated and cause for much concern, especially because of public disquiet about the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), but for-profit institutions and services do not yet occupy a significant place in the European system. On the contrary, scarce empirical findings indicate that some developments in this area are not very successful and are being discontinued.

Fourth, the term "private" may mean "non-national" or "foreign". Although the European Union committed in the Uruguay Round of the GATS negotiations to open up its territory to non-European providers, the actual number of non-European institutions in Europe is not very large. The largest numbers are probably found in central and eastern Europe. Most operate outside the national legal higher education framework, offering their own programmes and awarding their own degrees which may be accredited or recognised by other nations' quality assurance processes. A few countries have developed systems of licensing and accreditation of these non-national institutions, thereby partly integrating them in their higher education system.

Unitary and binary systems

An important dimension of the variation in higher education systems in Europe concerns the integration of colleges and other types of non-university, mostly vocationally oriented, institutions within the university system. Some countries, most notably the United Kingdom in 1992, have given these institutions university status, thus moving closer to a unitary system, although there are still colleges of higher education and further

education colleges that offer higher education programmes. Other countries have taken less radical measures, and are slowly integrating the various kinds of institutions in one general legal and regulatory framework. Still others wish to maintain a barrier between universities and other types of institutions, mainly because of a somewhat protectionist stance on academic prestige on the part of the established universities. However, even countries with a binary system will find it increasingly difficult to have a clear definition of the difference.

This matter is cause for concern and debate in European tertiary education systems. Programmes and degrees in the non-university sector in one country are found in universities in another, causing confusion among students and employers, and also leading to some resentment among institutions. The academic drift of non-university programmes and institutions is often motivated by the desire to achieve university status, not by a concern for high-quality programmes adapted to the needs of the labour market. Equally, universities often engage in vocational drift from a desire to enlarge their share of the market. Thus, boundaries between the two systems, their cultures and their respective political supporters become blurred. The Bologna Process does not directly address the unitary or binary nature of tertiary education systems, but as more and more countries are designing similar legislation for both parts, the Bologna Process in reality works towards integration.

This issue is gaining significance owing to increasing recognition of the importance of sub-degree short-cycle programmes (Kirsch *et al*., 2003). Short programmes of less than three years, flexibly adapted to the needs of the labour market and responding to lifelong learning needs, are becoming an important feature of European tertiary education. More generally, universities have to recognise that modern knowledge societies have very diverse needs in terms of education, training and human capital formation, which cannot be satisfied by longer degree programmes alone. In an integrated higher education system, in a binary structure or in other forms of differentiation, higher education in European countries will increasingly tend towards diversification of programmes, institutions and qualifications.

5.2. Quality assurance and accreditation

Preliminary remarks

In Europe, quality assurance in general, and accreditation more specifically, have become important policy instruments and regulatory devices. This section describes quality assurance and accreditation systems in various European countries. It draws from a number of recent surveys and

studies, including the European Network for Quality Assurance (ENQA) survey (Danish Evaluation Institute, 2003); the Trends III report (Reichert and Tauch, 2003); and, especially for central and eastern Europe, the UNESCO-CEPES (European Centre for Higher Education) study (Campbell and Rozsnyai, 2002). Specifically for accreditation there is the comparative overview of Vroeijenstijn (2003). The results of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education/International Association of University Presidents (INQAAHE-IAUP) questionnaire addressed to quality assurance agencies are also very informative (INQAAHE-IAUP, 2003). Although not yet published at the time of writing, the study on European accreditation commissioned by the German education trade union (Schwarz and Westerheijden, 2003) has also been used. More detailed information on quality assurance and accreditation systems in European countries can be found in these and other reports.

It is generally acknowledged that the terminology relating to "quality assurance" is not yet standardised. Some concepts mean different things in different settings, and this is certainly true in Europe. Various attempts have been made to formulate a set of definitions on which international consensus could be achieved (UNESCO-CEPES, 2002; Van Damme, 2003), but no authoritative list of definitions has emerged, although there are some general and widely shared elements. This chapter defines *quality assurance* as a specific form of evaluation, with processes and schemes that have as their objective to assess, monitor, guarantee, maintain and/or improve quality in higher education institutions and/or programmes. *Accreditation* is defined here as a particular form of quality assurance resulting in a formal judgment that leads to formal approval of an institution or programme that has been found by a legitimate body to meet predetermined and agreed standards, and may result in the granting of an accredited status to that provider or programme by responsible authorities. These definitions certainly are compatible with most uses of the terms and with the definitions of authors such as Schwarz and Westerheijden (2003) or Hämäläinen (2001).

The development of quality assurance and accreditation in Europe

Emergence of quality assurance systems in western Europe

The most obvious point about quality assurance in western Europe is undoubtedly its fast pace of growth. Before the 1980s, although quality was a central preoccupation in European universities, it did not lead to specific mechanisms or instruments at the level of institutional management or governmental policy. Quality management was part of the informal self-regulatory mechanisms of the academic community and not yet linked to

external approval or accountability. Today, most European countries have established formal quality assurance mechanisms and related reporting and external accountability procedures for the higher education sector.

Various factors have contributed to this rapid development (Campbell and Rozsnyai, 2002; Van Damme, 2003). First, mass higher education raised concerns about the potential decline of academic standards. In addition, policies in favour of wider participation and social inclusion put pressure on institutions to liberalise their entry requirements. Second, some key stakeholders, especially businesses, professional bodies and employers' organisations, lost confidence in traditional management of academic quality. In their view, it was not certain that higher education institutions were able to match their output, quantitatively and qualitatively, with the needs of modern workplaces and labour markets in an increasingly competitive and globalising economy. Other criticisms of higher education institutions included the rising numbers of drop-outs and failing students and the lengthening of study trajectories; clearly, institutions had difficulty ensuring internal efficiency, output levels and hence quality in a time of rapidly increasing participation. Third, budget restrictions and fiscal crises led to stagnating or declining government funding per student and pressures to increase the efficiency of public expenditure. Fourth, institutions were expected to meet demands for greater public accountability. Fifth, the higher education environment itself became more competitive owing to the erosion of traditional student recruitment practices, growing student mobility, increased mobility of professionals and academics, pressures from private institutions, etc. In this context, the notion of quality becomes a distinguishing labelling tool with potentially powerful effects.

Some of these factors were closely linked to political developments. Quality assurance policies and mechanisms in European countries were adopted in an environment in which the relationship between the state and institutions was evolving. Deregulation, increasing institutional autonomy, devolution of authority, a shifting balance between state and market-oriented elements in the steering of higher education systems, and the growing weight of output-related, performance-based factors in steering and sometimes also financing, were decisive features of that changing relationship. In general, there was an exchange between deregulation and institutional autonomy on the one hand and quality assurance, accountability and output-control on the other. Both the state and the institutions in most countries saw this exchange as advantageous.

The European pioneers in quality assurance in higher education were the United Kingdom, France and the Netherlands, which started formal quality assessments around 1985, closely followed by Denmark; the UK polytechnic sector had an external quality assurance system from the late

1960s. They imitated developments elsewhere, including in industry, and other European countries later followed in their footsteps. As recent surveys of quality assurance agencies show, the vast majority of agencies were established directly by the state or indirectly under political initiative. Higher education institutions took an active role only in the Netherlands, Belgium (Flanders), Germany and the United Kingdom; in the United Kingdom, this was a defensive measure against feared political direction.

An important stimulus to the spread of quality assurance in Europe was the 1994 European Pilot Projects on assessing the quality of higher education. As a consequence of the project, the Council of Education Ministers of the EU adopted a Recommendation on European co-operation in quality assurance in higher education in 1998 (98/561/EC) which called upon EU member states to establish quality assurance systems and to encourage institutions and authorities to co-operate and exchange practice.

To facilitate this, the European Commission supported the establishment of ENQA, which became operational in 2000. ENQA is a membership organisation whose mission is to promote co-operation, exchange best practices and stimulate the professional development of its members and their personnel. It also has a political role as the advocate of the quality assurance community in its relations with national governments, institutions and their organisations and the European Commission. Today, ENQA has 36 members from 21 European countries.

Quality assurance and accreditation as a regulatory instrument in Central and eastern Europe

Central and eastern Europe followed a different path from western Europe. Shortly after the fall of communism, many Central and eastern European countries introduced new higher education legislation, including measures for state-controlled quality assurance and accreditation. These policies were guided by a number of objectives: the transformation of curricula; the expansion of the system to accommodate an enormous rise in demand; the liberalisation of the higher education market; and the retreat of the state from centralised control and a move towards decentralised systems (Van der Wende and Westerheijden, 2003). The accreditation schemes were the state's response to the increasingly complex situation caused by the liberalisation of the higher education market and the establishment of numerous private higher education institutions. State-controlled accreditation was a regulatory device to control the liberalised system and, more specifically, to deal with the problem of "rogue" providers. In fact, private higher education provision has only a marginal share in many countries in central and eastern Europe but a significant one in certain

countries such as Poland. The accreditation systems had to cope not only with suspect private provision, but also sub-standard provision by traditional institutions reacting to increasing participation and social demand and sub-optimal state funding.

The spread of accreditation in western Europe

By the end of the 1990s, interest in accreditation as a regulatory device for approving programmes or institutions had also spread in western Europe (Westerheijden, 2001; Schwarz and Westerheijden, 2003). To fully understand this expansion of interest, developments in the social environment of higher education are of critical importance: the rise of the knowledge society, which encouraged policy makers to give greater attention to the higher education system and its efficiency; the impact of internationalisation and globalisation; the increasing penetration of market factors in the higher education system; and not at least the process of convergence set in motion by the Bologna Declaration. In this changing environment, governments – supported by external stakeholders including students, their families and the general public – look to policy instruments that increase the transparency of the higher education system, by guaranteeing that basic quality standards are met and by providing ways to evaluate differences in quality among competing providers. Accreditation thus is expected to fulfil the following needs, demands and ambitions:

- To guarantee that certain agreed basic quality standards are met and thus to ascertain that programmes and degrees – for example the new bachelor's and master's qualifications in the context of the Bologna Process – correspond to generally accepted basic quality descriptors, thus facilitating their international recognition.
- To sharpen quality assurance arrangements by making them more independent, by focusing on more absolute and externally benchmarked standards, by making them result in clearer judgements.
- To allow international benchmarking of standards and criteria, and thus of programmes and degrees, so that they can function in a context of student mobility, credit transfer and accumulation, and cross-border delivery.
- To strengthen the capacity of quality assurance arrangements to inform students and the general public and demonstrate the accountability of higher education institutions.

- To make it possible to link quality statements to other forms of regulation, including funding, financial aid to students, recognition of institutions, programmes or qualifications, entry to the professions, etc.

The spread of accreditation and accreditation-like practices is thus part of a process of renewal and revitalisation of existing quality assurance arrangements, which were felt in some countries to be insufficient as regulatory instruments for approval and transparency in the new context.

Some professionals and constituencies do not find the case for academic accreditation convincing. Pioneers from the western European quality assurance community feel that there is no need to examine basic quality in well-developed higher education systems where the robustness of internal quality assurance mechanisms at programme/subject level has been established and where institutions routinely use external quality assurance at programme level, as for example the UK external examiner system. Others consider that fixed standards are not very appropriate in an increasingly complex system, that accreditation at minimal quality standards has no advantages for the 90% or so of programmes or institutions that will pass accreditation, and that the quality improvement function will be jeopardised by a stronger emphasis on the external functions of quality assurance systems. Some institutional leaders dislike the additional burden imposed by accreditation systems and consider them to be a limitation of their institution's autonomy. Academics sometimes see accreditation as a manifestation of distrust in their academic quality and an encroachment on their sovereignty.

Accreditation systems, either in addition to existing quality assurance schemes or as new arrangements, have been established in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium (Flanders), Norway and Spain. Many other western European countries have partial accreditation mechanisms or accreditation-like practices. The ENQA survey among 36 members – both western and eastern European – shows that programme accreditation is done on a regular basis by 19 agencies (56%) and accreditation of institutions by eight (22%) (Danish Evaluation Institute, 2003). Schwarz and Westerheijden (2003) have more dramatic figures on the transition to accreditation in Europe. In 1998, among the 21 countries studied in western and eastern Europe, only six – nearly all Central and eastern European – countries had some kind of accreditation scheme on the basis of which recognition or approval was given to programmes or institutions. All the others still gave approval on the basis of a governmental decision not resulting from evaluation. Only five years later the picture is very different: all but two countries (Denmark and Greece) had some kind of accreditation procedure linked to the approval of institutions or programmes.

These results indicate that, in practice, the development of accreditation is often connected to or integrated in existing quality assurance arrangements. They also show that the concept of accreditation is not yet systematically and clearly defined. Schwarz and Westerheijden (2003) adopt a broader concept of accreditation than the ENQA survey: they stress the formal decision at the end of the evaluation procedure rather than the standards or benchmarks emphasised in the ENQA survey. An analysis by Vroeijenstijn (2003) of 13 western European accreditation schemes shows a lot of variety in national arrangements and approaches but also clear signs that a common framework is developing. To promote this convergence process, a European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) was established, including accreditation agencies from eight western European countries.

The current state of quality assurance and accreditation in European countries

An inventory (see the annex) of the quality assurance and accreditation agencies and schemes currently in operation in European countries can be established on the basis of the above-mentioned recent surveys and studies. In addition to these surveys, membership data of ENQA and INQAAHE and of regional networks in Europe have been consulted and an Internet search was carried out. As the field is evolving very rapidly, some information may be quickly out of date. To simplify the presentation, only the country, the name of the agency (in German, French or, in all other cases, English) and its Web address, its scope or range, and the main type of evaluation (according the ENQA survey typology) are given. More detailed information is available, in particular in the ENQA and INQAAHE surveys.

The inventory suggests a number of conclusions about the current state of higher education quality assurance and accreditation in Europe. First, almost all European countries now have an established formal agency or scheme. Those that do not are in the process of establishing one. This means that, five years later, the EU Council Recommendation of 1998 has been followed. Second, there is an enormous variety in how quality assurance and accreditation agencies in Europe work. Their scope, focus and tasks are different. More in-depth analysis would reveal even more diversity on the more operational aspects: governance, use of standards, criteria and benchmarks, evaluation methods and instruments, reporting, etc. The ENQA survey distinguishes eight main types of evaluation, but programme evaluation, programme accreditation and institutional audit are clearly becoming the dominant types. Still, the ENQA survey also points to an important communality in the fact that the four-stage model advocated in the European pilot projects assessing the quality of higher education and the

Council Recommendation still governs the basic methodological outlines of agencies' operations.

Cross-border and international activities and developments in European quality assurance and accreditation

One characteristic of European quality assurance and accreditation is its almost exclusively national nature. With the possible exception of some regional agencies and the EUA's Institutional Review Programme, all agencies are fully embedded in the nation-state and were directly established by or largely derive their legitimacy from the national government. Their primary objective is to regulate the higher education system within the national territory. Still, many of the challenges that quality assurance and accreditation are meant to address are not confined to national boundaries. Moreover, processes of internationalisation and globalisation as well as European co-operation in the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Agenda are also affecting national systems and agencies. Cross-border activity and international co-operation on European quality assurance and accreditation will therefore almost certainly grow significantly in the coming years. This section describes a number of developments and issues in this regard.

Quality assurance for cross-border provision

European quality assurance and accreditation agencies normally focus on provision by indigenous institutions recognised by national authorities and operating on national territory. They are not yet well prepared to tackle the consequences for quality assurance of cross-border provision. Several experts have pointed to the combined challenges of quality assurance of internationalisation and internationalisation of quality assurance (Van Damme, 1999, 2001; Van der Wende, 1999; Campbell and Van der Wende, 2000).

In terms of quality assurance and accreditation by the *receiving* country of cross-border provision of higher education services, there is a tendency for national agencies to be mandated to evaluate and accredit "private" – in many cases "non-national" – providers operating on the national territory. This is certainly the case for central and eastern European countries such as Poland, Hungary and Romania that have established accreditation schemes to accommodate the influx of private providers, often from the United States, the United Kingdom and Russia. Certain examples from recent surveys suggest that national agencies increasingly cover foreign/private providers. For example, the Dutch accreditation agency allows private providers to have their programmes accredited; the Flemish legal framework includes the registration and accreditation of private/foreign provision. The

United Kingdom does not distinguish between the public and (the few) private institutions with degree-awarding powers; foreign providers are allowed to establish a presence provided they comply with the law but they are not subject to UK quality assurance processes. The new Swiss accreditation agency includes the non-public sector in its activities, while in Austria the *Akkreditierungsrat* was set up explicitly to accredit private providers operating in the country. It is certainly the case that countries that are opening up higher education to private/foreign providers – a difficult and sensitive issue in western Europe – are taking approval or licensing decisions more and more on the basis of quality evaluations and accreditation. There are also issues surrounding intra-European cross-border education for which internal market rules come into play. The Confederation of European Union Rectors' Conference (CEURC) Transnational Education Report (Adam, 2001), commissioned by the European Commission, urges Europe's national quality assurance agencies to assume responsibility for quality control of imported education by monitoring the activities of foreign providers, linking with exporting countries, reporting bogus institutions, seeking bilateral solutions for problems that arise, and providing advice and information to the public on problems associated with imported and private education.

In terms of quality assurance by the *exporting* country, there are also some interesting developments. Most universities do not differentiate between native, foreign and mobile students in their normal programmes. This implies that student mobility, in its traditional forms, is normally covered by existing quality assurance mechanisms. In many quality assurance protocols, internationalisation and the way in which specific needs of international students are dealt with are included among the quality aspects reviewed. Thus, in Europe, cross-border provision in the form of student mobility may be assumed to be addressed by national quality assurance and accreditation arrangements.

For other means of exporting higher education services, the situation is less clear. On the basis of the available information, only the United Kingdom's quality assurance arrangements explicitly cover provision by its higher institutions outside the national territory ("collaborative provision"). The UK Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), building on the work of the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC), has produced a code of practice on collaborative provision in higher education (QAA, 1999). The QAA carries out quality audits of provision by British universities and colleges in other countries on a voluntary basis. A large number of quality audit visits have taken place in more than 20 countries worldwide and full reports are published and available on the Internet. Similar guidelines exist elsewhere; in France the national rector's conference has adopted a charter which states

that French universities should be fully responsible for the quality of programmes delivered elsewhere, but it is unclear whether such provision is covered by the French institutional evaluation system.

An important international initiative has been the recent adoption by UNESCO and the Council of Europe of a Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education (Riga, June 2001). This code, building on the QAA code and others and closely linked to the Lisbon Convention on the recognition of qualifications, puts forward a number of essential principles concerning quality assurance for cross-border arrangements that signatory countries should respect. However, the recent report on cross-border education in central and eastern European countries reveals a low level of awareness of the code (Campbell and Rozsnyai, 2002). The QAA and UNESCO codes indicate that quality assurance arrangements should follow cross-border provision from the exporting country to the receiving country. This might imply that quality assurance systems are exported to countries in which they do not have legally recognised status. However, the QAA's overseas audit activities do not cover the foreign partner organisation and its Code of Practice requires UK institutions to comply with the law of the countries in which they operate. This runs counter to the prevailing principle that the receiving country is solely responsible for degrees delivered on its territory and for the quality assurance arrangements protecting them (Campbell and Van der Wende, 2000). In fact, many importing countries – often without strong quality assurance and accreditation systems themselves – demand that the exporting nations have rigorous and reliable quality assurance systems in which they can have faith.

The case of provision by distance education or electronic delivery is even more complex. Again, only the UK QAA has produced guidelines to deal with the issue of quality assurance for distance learning. The QAA guidelines follow rather closely the generic guidelines for quality assurance of higher education programmes in general and the guidelines for collaborative provision discussed above. In continental western Europe, there is no known set of standards, criteria or benchmarks to be used by national quality assurance or accreditation agencies for the assessment of distance learning. However, this does not necessarily mean that agencies have not developed internal procedures for dealing with these activities or that no attention is given to the issue (Adam, 2001). Since distance education and e-learning are invisible to authorities in receiving countries (excluding countries that limit Internet access for their citizens), they generally expect quality assurance and accreditation systems in the sending countries to be strict enough to check the quality standards of programmes delivered electronically elsewhere. In their report for ENQA, Campbell and Van der Wende (2000) list a range of implications and questions that have to

be answered when applying quality assessment procedures to distance learning and e-learning provision.

Co-operation among European quality assurance and accreditation agencies

In recent years international co-operation among European quality assurance and accreditation agencies has increased dramatically. Most national agencies are fully aware of the challenges they will face because of the internationalisation of higher education systems and the activities of higher education institutions. A number of rather elementary forms of international co-operation among agencies include practices such as: inclusion of foreign subject experts in evaluation or accreditation panels; inclusion of foreign colleagues or experts on the board or governing committee of the agency; international benchmarking of standards and criteria used in evaluation and accreditation; and use of internationally developed level descriptors for bachelor's and master's type qualifications. The last item has received particular attention in recent years: the so-called Dublin descriptors for bachelor's and master's type qualifications, developed with the Joint Quality Initiative, are increasingly referred to. The project "Tuning Educational Structures in Europe" (see below) is also developing subject-specific descriptors that can be linked to quality assurance or accreditation benchmarking.

Joint quality assessment

Actual joint quality assessment experiments, executed jointly by several quality assurance and accreditation agencies from different countries, are still infrequent, but some interesting examples are worth mentioning. Already in the 1994 European Pilot Project, some countries carried out parallel programme reviews in engineering, communication and design. From the mid-1990s, the Dutch and Flemish quality assurance agencies (VSNU and VLIR, respectively) have carried out joint quality assessments in a number of subject areas. In 1999, a cross-border quality assessment project was carried out in physics, in which Flemish, Dutch and German quality assurance agencies collaborated. In this project a joint methodology was developed and formally adopted by the three participating agencies, and the peer review panels were the same for all site visits in the participating universities.

In 2002-03, ENQA co-ordinated a major pilot project supported by the European Commission, the Trans-National European Evaluation Project (TEEP). It consisted of testing a method of cross-border evaluation in three disciplines (physics, history and veterinary sciences) in co-operation with

the respective SOCRATES Thematic Networks for those disciplines. This project provided an important opportunity to experience the benefits and risks of joint quality assessments by several national agencies.

Networking

As already pointed out, networking of European agencies has recently developed rapidly. ENQA has established itself as the leader in the field and is recognised as such by institutions, students and national and European political authorities. The Prague Communiqué of 2001 invited the network to strengthen its organisation and to undertake an extensive survey of its membership; the results were published in 2003. The role of ENQA was emphasised again at the Berlin ministerial conference and it was called upon to develop "an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance and to explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer review system for quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies or bodies". This task is to be carried out in co-operation with the higher education sector, represented at European level by the EUA, the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) and the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB) and the results will be presented to the next Bologna ministerial conference in the spring of 2005. ENQA took upon itself to develop a register of agencies on the basis of shared standards of good practice and to transform the network into an association open to agencies from all Bologna signatory states. In the meantime, the network is surveying its members views on the network's future strategic objectives and is developing a number of projects, such as identifying barriers to convergence in quality assurance practices and developing a code of good practice for quality assurance agencies.

The agencies working on accreditation model are attempting to establish the European Consortium for Accreditation,[2] which would consist of a sub-set of ENQA members. It is too early to determine whether this effort will succeed and whether the two networks will co-exist in the near future. However, the Berlin Communiqué called on ENQA to take due account of the expertise of other quality assurance associations and networks. The ECA initiative builds partly on the Joint Quality Initiative referred to above, which was initiated by the Dutch and Flemish Education Ministers in the context of their co-operation in establishing a common accreditation agency, but which also involved non-accreditation agencies. The Dutch and Flemish case is a particular and interesting illustration of co-operation in which two sovereign countries established a single accreditation system and agency, the

2. Austria, Belgium (Flemish), Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Switzerland.

Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Agency. The political negotiations were concluded in the summer of 2003 and legislation is now under way in both countries. This is seen by many not only as a pioneering case, but also as a promising example for supra-national quality assurance and accreditation arrangements in Europe.

In addition to the ENQA network, some regional networks have been developed. The Network of Central and Eastern European Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education was established in 2001 in order to foster co-operation, exchange good practice, act as a clearinghouse for information and strengthen convergence among 18 partner organisations from Germany to Russia and from Latvia to Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, with the Hungarian accreditation agency acting as secretariat. Building on a rich tradition of co-operation, five countries – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden – have established the Nordic Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education (NOQA). This network, which is closely linked to ENQA, has initiated an interesting project on mutual recognition among the Nordic quality assurance and accreditation agencies (Lindeberg and Kristoffersen, 2002). The project shows that mutual recognition is a promising avenue for further exploration but requires work on many conceptual and operational issues.

Mutual recognition

Formal mutual recognition among European quality assurance and accreditation agencies is still rare, the Nordic example being the only clear instance. However, this does not imply that European agencies do not in fact recognise each others' work and results. Typically, European agencies rather easily accept the outcomes of quality assessments done by colleagues in the ENQA network, and more formal mutual recognition agreements between quality assurance and accreditation agencies are likely to become more frequent in the near future. The links may well be between European and non-European agencies, reflecting perhaps patterns of cross-border education and shared approaches to evaluation and review. For example, the UK QAA is building a network of bilateral links and co-operation agreements with agencies in Malaysia, Jordan and Egypt with others coming on line.

Credit transfer and quality assurance

Mechanisms of credit transfer within mobility programmes imply at least implicit mutual recognition of quality assurance and accreditation arrangements between the sending and receiving institutions, if not countries. The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), a method for

credit recognition and transfer for students studying abroad in the ERASMUS-SOCRATES programme, started in 1989 as an experiment in a restricted number of disciplines and institutions and was fully integrated in ERASMUS-SOCRATES from 1995/96. ECTS has now been introduced in over 1 000 higher education institutions. This is one of the Bologna Process action lines and a growing number of countries are making ECTS obligatory. In Germany, the use of ECTS is a condition of the accreditation of new study programmes. The European Commission is introducing an ECTS Label for institutions that apply ECTS in all subject areas. ECTS is not intended as a solution to problems of equivalence of courses and credits in terms of content or quality. It is rather a tool for transparency facilitating the decision on credit recognition of the institution. Under ECTS, the transfer of credits or study points from the host to the home institution presupposes mutual trust in the quality of the partners involved. This trust is not explicitly expressed, but instruments such as a mechanism for calculating the study load, an extensive information package and the so-called transcript of records give the home institution sufficient information about the quality of the student's learning experience.

Even if the ERASMUS programme does not directly address the standards and methodologies of national quality assurance and accreditation arrangements, mass student mobility under the programme created a need for an implicit recognition of the validity and strength of Europe's national systems. ERASMUS and ECTS have contributed to the fact that universities have begun to engage in internal quality assurance and that more and more universities and programmes are externally quality assured by their respective national agencies. State recognition or approval of institutions and programmes – with or without formal accreditation – is seen as a guarantee of sufficient quality. Under ERASMUS, the quality of the partner university is verified on the basis of the ECTS documentation, complemented by personal contacts and student experiences. In future, wider use of internal and external quality assurance mechanisms is expected to raise confidence and speed up recognition decisions taken by individual universities.

Important initiatives promoting European convergence in quality assurance and accreditation

The activities of the EUA

European convergence is progressing not only through co-operation and networking among quality assurance and accreditation agencies, other initiatives are also important. The EUA's Institutional Review Programme is a voluntary scheme of institutional evaluation, aimed at benchmarking good

practice and improving institutional management and is highly valued by participants. In 2002-03, the EUA co-ordinated the Commission supported Quality Culture project, in which groups of universities helped each other to introduce internal quality assurance mechanisms to improve quality. In these and other projects and in its policy statements on quality assurance, the EUA, acting as the representative of the interests of European universities, promotes a university viewpoint on quality assurance based on respect for institutional autonomy and institutions' self-regulatory capacity. An important side effect of EUA projects is the fact that shared practice and exchange of experience contribute to the convergence of views and institutional practices in the field of quality assurance. In the near future, the EUA will undertake a new initiative, the Quality Committee for Europe, to serve as a platform for monitoring developments in European quality assurance from the perspective of the universities.

The Tuning project

Another project, Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, is an initiative co-ordinated by the universities of Deusto (Bilbao, Spain) and Groningen (Netherlands) and supported by the European Commission in which some 135 universities participate. The project addresses several of the action lines of the Bologna Process, notably the adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees and the adoption of a two-cycle system. It also aims at identifying generic and subject-specific competencies for first- and second-cycle studies in nine subject areas (business studies, education sciences, geology, history, mathematics, chemistry, physics, European studies and nursing) and provides a methodology for analysing common elements and differences.

In Phase II (2003-04), the project will consolidate and validate the findings with a series of stakeholders (employers, professional associations, quality assurance agencies, credential evaluators, etc.). Participation will be extended to acceding and candidate countries. The Tuning methodology will be transferred to the SOCRATES-ERASMUS Thematic Networks, which could act as permanent platforms, together with other actors, for the continuous development and updating of competencies. Within the Tuning project, a specific task force for quality assurance will be set up to link results, *e.g.* the competence descriptors, to quality assurance and accreditation protocols and standards.

Role and initiatives of the European Commission

The European Commission also supports activities aimed at promoting an internal quality culture within universities and at improving the impact of

external quality evaluations. The internal quality assurance activities are supported under the Quality Culture project organised by the EUA. The project demonstrated the need for strong university leadership and university autonomy in developing a quality culture. The European Commission intends to continue this project with a second group of universities.

External quality assurance is being promoted through ENQA. As an experiment, ENQA carried out an external evaluation of 14 university departments against sets of common evaluation criteria in three subject areas: history, physics and veterinary science. In 2002-03, the Trans-national European Evaluation Project showed that it is possible to evaluate study programmes across borders against sets of common criteria if the universities concerned agree to take the common criteria as a starting point for the evaluation.

Following the Berlin Ministerial Conference (September 2003), the European Commission presented a report to the Parliament and the Council of Ministers on the implementation of the Council Recommendation of September 1998 on European co-operation in quality assurance in higher education (European Commission, 2003). Drawing lessons from the experience acquired, the report contains proposals on how to make European quality assurance more coherent.

Future goals within the Bologna Process

The Bologna Process has specific goals and action lines regarding quality assurance. At the Berlin Conference, quality assurance was identified as one of its intermediate priorities, along with the two-cycle system and the recognition of degrees and periods of study. Concrete targets have been set. All signatory states to the Bologna Declaration should have quality assurance systems in operation by 2005. At the European level, ENQA was mandated to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance and to explore ways of ensuring adequate peer review for quality assurance and accreditation agencies by 2005. Ministers committed to start implementing the two-cycle system by 2005. Six years after the signing of the Bologna Declaration, the legal and practical conditions should be in place and students who meet the entry conditions should be able to enrol in the new style programmes of their choice. The new degrees should fit into national qualifications frameworks, allowing citizens, under well-defined conditions, to move between different types of formal, non-formal and informal learning. It is intended that the national qualifications framework should be coherent with the emerging framework of qualifications in the European Higher Education Area

(EHEA) and based on a common understanding of learning outcomes and competencies acquired by graduates.

An overarching framework of qualifications in the EHEA, complemented by a coherent system of quality assurance – for Education Ministers to approve by 2005 – is intended to create a climate of trust based on transparency and would facilitate the recognition of degrees/diplomas and periods of study.

5.3. Recognition of higher education qualifications

Academic and professional recognition of qualifications in Europe

Academic recognition

Academic recognition refers to the recognition of foreign degrees/diplomas (or study periods and credits) as education credentials. In most countries it is a responsibility of governmental bodies or, as in the United Kingdom, degree-awarding bodies. Until the 1980s, academic recognition of qualifications was mainly a matter of verifying equivalence by comparing curricula. Since the late 1980s the notion of "equivalence" has been replaced by that of "recognition". A foreign qualification thus no longer has to be based on a comparable curriculum but can be accepted even if there are differences, on the condition that they are not substantial. As early as the 1950s, the Council of Europe set up conventions and information networks under an overall policy to enhance mobility and mutual acceptance of credentials in Europe. UNESCO, through CEPES, its centre for higher education in Bucharest, is also very active in this field. Co-operation between the two organisations led to the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, adopted in Lisbon in April 1997 and known as the Lisbon Recognition Convention, which replaced existing conventions. It adopted the notion of recognition and put the burden of proof on the responsible authority in the host country. Mutual trust in each others' higher education systems and information became the key elements of the new system of recognition of qualifications. A network of national information centres (ENIC) facilitates recognition procedures and/or information on recognition at national level. In the European Union, the National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARIC), a separate network of 31 countries closely related to the ERASMUS programme, was set up in 1984. Because the two networks have overlapping membership, they decided to have joint network meetings, a joint Web site, joint projects and guidelines. The networks are very active and integrate their work in the

Bologna Process. Five years after the approval of the Convention, an important conference was held in Lisbon in April 2002.

The Lisbon Recognition Convention and the ENIC/NARIC networks are powerful tools for stimulating recognition of degrees/diplomas. According to Reichert and Tauch (2003), 22 "Bologna" countries have now ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention; only Belgium, Greece, Ireland, Spain and Turkey have not yet ratified or signed. However, a survey of ministries, rectors' conferences and institutions for the Trends III report (Reichert and Tauch, 2003) shows that many are unaware of the importance of the Lisbon Recognition Convention. All Bologna Process countries have established ENIC/NARIC offices, often but not always within Education Ministries. However, according to the same survey, many institutions lack information on or understanding of the existence and work of ENIC/NARIC. The two networks have therefore decided to make their information policy more effective and user-friendly. There are often differences in terms of their legal competence. For example, in some countries, ENIC/NARIC has the authority to make academic recognition decisions, in the United Kingdom, practical responsibility for implementing the Lisbon Recognition Convention lies jointly with ENIC/NARIC when a general assessment for the recognition of overseas qualifications is required, and with individual higher education institutions when a student seeks to enter a particular institution. Responsibility for the management and maintenance of the framework of higher education qualifications lies with QAA, which is part of the academic infrastructure for quality and standards negotiated with and agreed by stakeholders in higher education. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) maintains lists of "recognised" and "listed" UK bodies – UK institutions with degree-awarding powers and some 300 others, a small number of them foreign – that offer programmes leading to the award of UK degrees by recognised bodies (see *www.dfes.gov.uk/recognisedukdegrees*).

The Diploma Supplement is another important instrument in the field of academic recognition. Jointly developed by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO-CEPES, it is a document accompanying a diploma or degree which provides information on the level of the qualification, the workload, the content of the curriculum, the results obtained by the holder of the qualification, the function of the qualification in the national framework and a short description of the national educational system in which the qualification was obtained. It offers a way to describe individual qualifications, making it easier for foreign credential evaluators and admission officers to assess them. Together with ECTS, the Diploma Supplement should contribute to the transparency and hence the smoothness of academic recognition. In the Bologna Declaration of June 1999, the Diploma Supplement was explicitly mentioned in the first action line,

testifying to the importance attached to it by Education Ministers as an instrument for the creation of easily readable and comparable degrees.

Reliable data on the implementation and use of the Diploma Supplement are lacking. Some countries impose it and others are planning to do so. A recent small survey showed that ten Bologna Process countries still do not apply it (Tauch and Rauhvargers, 2002). However, in the countries that have introduced it, there seems to be a gap between the official rhetoric and daily reality in institutions. According to Reichert and Tauch (2003), the speedy implementation of the Diploma Supplement foreseen in the Bologna Declaration is being hampered by various problems. Employers, one of the main target groups, still seem largely unaware of its existence, use and potential benefits.

In January 2004, the European Commission proposed to integrate different transparency instruments developed for vocational training (Europass, European Portfolio, European CV) as well as the Diploma Supplement (originally developed for higher education) and bring them together into a single European framework for transparency of qualifications (called EUROPASS). Various other initiatives are being taken. In 2002 the ECTS Counsellors and the Diploma Supplement Promoters, both set up by the European Commission and co-ordinated by the EUA, were merged in order to improve their influence at institutional level. Within the Bologna Process and the "open method of co-ordination" of the European Commission, specific objectives have been formulated: by 2005, all graduating students should receive free of charge a Diploma Supplement issued in a widely spoken European language. To promote this, the European Commission has introduced a Diploma Supplement Label for universities that already issue the Diploma Supplement.

Professional recognition

Professional recognition has to do with the decision to grant professional rights to a holder of a qualification, such as entry into a regulated profession, a licence to practice, or status and title. In contrast to academic recognition, where the EU has limited competence, this area is regulated by several European Directives. After several specific Directives aimed at imposing and harmonising core curricula for specific professional qualifications, more general Directives have been issued. European Directives 89/48/EEC and 92/51/EEC provide the basic legal framework for the recognition of professional qualifications in the countries of the European Union and the European Economic Area. They state that degrees completed after at least three years of higher education leading to regulated professional status should be recognised unless substantial differences can be proven. However,

the regulation of professions varies from country to country and this can create problems for mobility.

The European Commission has launched a proposal to codify and simplify the existing sectoral and general European Directives.[3] A promising new development is the possibility for applicants to receive a waiver of the compensation measures (completion of an adaptation period of up to three years or taking an aptitude test) often required by the host country as a condition for recognition under the general Directives (but not under the sectoral Directives) that provide for automatic recognition. Article 15 of the proposal states that professional associations may notify the European Commission of common platforms which they establish at European level. "Common platform" here means a set of criteria of professional qualifications which attests to a sufficient level of competence for the pursuit of a given profession and on the basis of which the professional associations accredit qualifications obtained in the member states. If the European Commission is of the opinion that the platform in question facilitates the mutual recognition of professional qualifications, it informs the member states and decides that this is valid arrangement for all member states.

In addition to European legislation, professional recognition of qualifications may also depend on national legislation or regulations of professional bodies. In the United Kingdom, for example, professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRs) have "accreditation" and validation systems for recognising programmes and qualifications for specific professional status and title. These bodies are responsible for decisions regarding the European Directives.[4] UK professional bodies are very active in accrediting and validating programmes abroad. Examples include the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors and the Royal Institute of British Architects operating in Latin America, China, and central and eastern Europe. The non-regulated professions are also increasingly organised and are developing recognition systems and procedures which often impose additional requirements on holders of qualifications. In most continental European countries, academic degrees also serve as professional qualifications, giving access to professional careers without requiring additional examinations or training. In many countries, however, automatic recognition of academic degrees as professional qualifications is under heavy pressure. Several professions in the fields of law, accountancy,

3. COM(2002) 119 final, O.J C 181 E of 30.07.2002.

4. Full details of the process for recognition for UK citizens going abroad in Europe and incoming professionals is available on a Web site maintained by the DfES at *www.dfes.gov.uk/europeopen*.

medicine, etc., impose additional requirements on holders of academic degrees for entry into the profession. This evolution is seen as very problematic by the universities, since they consider it an erosion of the professional value of their degrees. In continental Europe, where state approval of programmes and qualifications was often synonymous with professional recognition, this development is leading to conflicts of interests between the higher education community and student organisations on the one hand, and professional bodies and employers' organisations on the other. Increasing the international organisation of the professions will have a harmonising effect on these developments.

Convergence of recognition and quality assurance

Despite the considerable achievements, recognition still faces great challenges in Europe. It is at the heart of the Bologna Process, but as European higher education systems are transformed, traditional tools and instruments of credential evaluation are insufficient. The Prague Communiqué of 2001 therefore called for co-operation between the quality assurance and recognition communities. Recognition of qualifications more and more comes down to the basic question of whether a given programme or institution meets the required standards. Quality assurance should contribute to the mobility of graduates and to the recognition and portability of credentials. Campbell and Van der Wende (2000) state that lack of acquaintance with national quality assurance developments is responsible for rather conservative attitudes towards the assessment of new degrees. They argue that more transparency and international convergence in quality assurance processes would foster mutual recognition and acceptance of qualifications, thus decreasing the bureaucracy of recognition. A small survey of the ENIC/NARIC network on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the Lisbon Recognition Convention indicated that difficulties in accessing information on the status and quality of higher education institutions and their programmes constituted a major obstacle to the recognition of qualifications. On the other side, there are indications that decisions taken regarding recognition of academic qualifications among Lisbon signatories are more and more positively influenced by trust in the national quality assurance and accreditation systems. Thus, developments in the field of recognition of qualifications could also foster the implicit or explicit recognition of quality assurance systems.

Consequently, the European ENIC/NARIC networks and the ENQA network have met and have developed a shared agenda; recommendations on issues of shared interest were developed for the ministerial meeting in Berlin in September 2003.

Annex
Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agencies and Schemes in European Countries

Country	Agency	Scope	Main evaluation type
Albania	Accreditation Agency of Higher Education, Accreditation Council	National, university and non-university sectors	Programme and institutional evaluation and accreditation
Austria	Fachhochschulrat – *www.fhr.ac.at*	National, non-university sector	Institutional and programme evaluation, programme accreditation
Austria	Östereichischer Akkreditierungsrat – *www.akkreditierungsrat.at*	National, private universities	Institutional accreditation, programme accreditation
Belgium (Flanders)	Flemish Inter-university Council – *www.vlir.be*	Regional, university sector	Programme evaluation
Belgium (Flanders)	Council of Flemish Institutes for Higher Education – *www.vlhora.be*	Regional, non-university sector	Programme evaluation
Bulgaria	National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency at the Council of Ministers – *www.neaa.government.bg*	National, university and non-university sectors	Programme and institutional evaluation and accreditation
Croatia	National Council for Higher Education	National, university and non-university sectors	Programme evaluation in function of accreditation by ministry
Cyprus	Council of Educational Evaluation – *sekap@cytanet.com.cy*	National, non-university sector	Programme evaluation, programme accreditation
Czech Republic	Accreditation Commission – *www.msmt.cz/_DOMEK/default.asp?CAI=2856*	National, university and non-university sectors	Programme accreditation
Denmark	Danish Evaluation Institute – *www.eva.dk*	National, university and non-university sectors	Programme evaluation and accreditation, institutional evaluation
Estonia	Estonian Higher Education Accreditation Centre – *www.ekak.archimedes.ee*	National, university and non-university sectors	Programme accreditation
Finland	Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council – *www.finheec.fi*	National, university and non-university sectors	Programme and institutional evaluation
France	Comité national d'évaluation – *www.cne-evaluation.fr*	National, university sector	Institutional evaluation
Germany	Akkreditierungsrat – *www.akkreditierungsrat.de*	National, university and non-university sectors	Meta-accreditation
Germany	Zentrale Evaluations- und Akkreditierungsagentur (ZevA) – *www.zeva.uni-hannover.de*	Regional, university and non-university sectors	Programme accreditation

Country	Agency	Scope	Main evaluation type
Germany	Akkreditierungs-, Certifizierungs- und Qualitätssicherungs-Institut (ACQUIN) – *www.acquin.org*	Regional, university and non-university sectors	Programme accreditation
Germany	Agentur für Qualitätssicherung durch Akkreditierung von Studiengängen (AQAS) – *www.aqas.de*	Regional, university and non-university sectors	Programme accreditation
Germany	Akkreditierungsagentur für Studiengänge der Ingenieurwissenschaften, der Informatik, der Naturwissenschaften und der Mathematik (ASIIN) – *www.asiin.de*	Regional, university and non-university sectors, subject-specific	Programme accreditation
Germany	Akkreditierungsagentur für Stuidengänge im Bereich Heilpädagogik, Pflege, Gesundheit und Soziale Arbeit (AHPGS) – *www.ahpgs.de*	Regional, university and non-university sectors, subject-specific	Programme accreditation
Germany	Stiftung Evaluationsagentur Baden-Wuerttemberg (EVALAG) – *www.evalag.de*	Regional, university and non-university sectors	Programme evaluation
Germany	Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation – *www.fibaa.de*	Regional, university and non-university sectors, subject-specific	Programme accreditation
Hungary	Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC) – *www.mab.hu*	National, university and non-university sectors	Programme and institutional accreditation
Iceland	Division of Evaluation and Supervision – *http://mrn.stjr.is*	National, university and non-university sectors	Programme and institutional evaluation
Ireland	Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) – *www.hetac.ie*	National, non-university sector	Programme and institutional evaluation and accreditation
Ireland	Higher Education Authority – *www.hea.ie*	National, university sector	Institutional evaluation, meta-evaluation
Ireland	National Qualification Authority of Ireland – *www.nqai.ie*	National, non-university sector	Institutional evaluation
Italy	National Committee for the Evaluation of the University System – *www.vsu.it*	National, university sector	Programme and institutional evaluation, institutional accreditation
Latvia	Higher Education Quality Evaluation Centre – *www.aiknc.lv*	National, university and non-university sectors	Programme and institutional evaluation and accreditation
Lithuania	Lithuanian Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education – *www.skvc.lt*	National, university and non-university sectors	Programme evaluation and accreditation
Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	Ministry of Education and Science, Accreditation Board	National, university and non-university sectors	Programme and institutional evaluation and accreditation
Netherlands	Inspectorate of Higher Education – *www.owinsp.nl*	National, university and non-university sectors	Programme and institutional evaluation, meta-evaluation
Netherlands	Association of Universities in the Netherlands – *www.vsnu.nl*	National, university sector	Programme evaluation

Country	Agency	Scope	Main evaluation type
Netherlands	Netherlands Quality Agency – *www.hbo-raad.nl*	National, non-university sector	Programme evaluation
Netherlands	Netherlands Accreditation Organisation – *www.nao-ho.nl*	National, university and non-university sectors	Programme accreditation
Norway	Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) – *www.nokut.no*	National, university and non-university sectors	Programme and institutional evaluation and accreditation
Poland	National General Accreditation Commission – *www.men.waw.pl*	National, university and non-university sectors	Programme and institutional accreditation
Poland	University Accreditation Commission – *main.amu.edu.pl/~ects/uka/uka.html*	National, university sector	Programme accreditation
Poland	Association of Management Education Forum – *www.semforum.org.pl*	National, private university and non-university sectors, subject-specific	Programme evaluation and accreditation
Portugal	National Council for Evaluation of Higher Education (CNAVES) – *www.cnaves.pt*	National, university and non-university sectors	Institutional evaluation
Romania	National Council for Academic Assessment and Accreditation – *www.cneaa.ro*	National, university and non-university sectors	Programme and institutional accreditation
Slovak Republic	Accreditation Commission – *www.akredkom.sk*	National, university and non-university sectors	Programme and institutional accreditation
Slovenia	Council for Higher Education	National, university and non-university sectors	Institutional accreditation
Slovenia	Higher Education Quality Assessment Commission (HEQAC)	National, university and non-university sectors	Programme and institutional evaluation
Spain	National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA) – *www.aneca.es*	National, university sector	Programme and institutional evaluation and accreditation
Spain	Agency for Quality Assurance in the Catalan University System – *www.agenqua.org*	Regional, university sector	Programme and institutional evaluation
Sweden	National Agency for Higher Education – *www.hsv.se*	National, university sector	Programme and institutional evaluation and accreditation
Switzerland	Center for Accreditation and Quality Assurance of the Swiss Universities (OAQ) – *www.oaq.ch*	National, university sector	Programme and institutional accreditation
United Kingdom	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) – *www.qaa.ac.uk*	National, university and non-university sectors	Programme and institutional evaluation

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