

Foreword

In the Prague Communiqué of 19 May 2001, the European Ministers of Education called upon the universities, other higher education institutions, national agencies and ENQA to collaborate in establishing a common framework of reference, and to disseminate good practice. This mandate has been taken up by ENQA as a challenge to work even more actively in the process towards ensuring a credible European quality assurance environment.

A major focus in this process is the extent, to which national external quality assurance procedures may meet the Bologna requirements for European compatibility and transparency.

This focus is reflected in ENQA's decision to initiate this major survey, which was in its first phase also included in discussions with the European University Association (EUA) and the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB). The main purpose of this survey is to identify shared protocols of quality assurance among European countries. Accordingly each European agency has been asked to fill in a questionnaire detailing the evaluation practices in place in the agency.

The survey is thus able to determine which evaluation models are used in various countries and to analyse basic similarities and dissimilarities. The results of the survey demonstrate that European quality assurance has extended both in scope and type of evaluation methods since the late 1990s, and that especially the concepts of accreditation and benchmarking are gaining new ground fast. In terms similar to my concluding remarks in a Status Report from 1998 on European Evaluation of Higher Education I can state, however, that in a sense the status quo may be described as either a glass that is half full because the European evaluation procedures in place all build on the same methodological principles. Or the glass may be described as half empty because the comparative analysis of the survey demonstrates many differences between the application of the methods to the specific national and institutional contexts.

So the results of this survey stress ENQA's growing significance as a framework for sharing and developing European best practises in external quality assurance and the need for even closer cooperation both with ENQA member agencies and governments and with our partners, the EU Commission, the universities and the students.

I hope therefore that the reader will find the survey and the new information it contains useful and inspirational.

Christian Thune

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ENQA Steering Group