The Legitimacy of Quality Assurance in Higher Education: The Role of Public Authorities and Institutions

The enhancement of the quality of European higher education at institutional, national and European levels has been among the key issues and concerns of the Bologna Process from the very beginning. In the rapidly changing environment of higher education, the provision and maintenance of high quality and standards in higher education institutions have become a major concern for institutions and governments.

The Council of Europe's Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research (CDESR) will organise a Forum on 'The Legitimacy of Quality Assurance in Higher Education: the Role of Public Authorities and Institutions' at Council of Europe headquarters in Strasbourg. It will gather some 90 European higher education policy makers.

Within the context of the Council of Europe Higher Education Forum, this year's event will look at the triangle of public responsibility, governance and quality assurance.

In particular, it will focus on the roles and responsibilities of public authorities in quality assurance, and will consider elements of importance to the legitimacy and acceptance of quality assurance methods and results by higher education institutions, students and staff, but also by the broader society.

The Forum will explore different understandings and practices of quality assurance in different countries within and across Europe, considering in particular three case studies from Bulgaria, Ireland and Poland.

Finding the balance between the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area as adopted by European ministers of education in Bergen in 2005, the systems of national quality assurance and quality assurance at the level of higher education institutions in each country is a major challenge. How to build a common understanding and mutual trust to have quality assurance decisions made in one 'Bologna' country adopted in others?

In keeping with the Council of Europe's long-standing activities on the recognition of qualifications, the relationship between recognition and quality assurance will also be of importance. Quality assurance is an important first step in individual recognition. Fair recognition of qualifications needs full implementation of quality assurance and cooperation among quality assurance systems across the European Higher Education Area. This is of particular importance for the cross-border qualifications and joint degrees.

While most public debate focuses on quality assurance, there is every reason to underline that quality development is an equally important aspect. Quality development is a precondition for quality assurance, and it is in particular the responsibility of higher education institutions and of the academic community. Public authorities, however, play an important role in laying down the framework within which both quality development and quality assurance can take place with a reasonable investment of resources and effort.

The interactive format of the Forum, including case studies, a panel discussion on the acceptance for quality assurance and group discussions is intended first and foremost to contribute to collective thinking and debate on the relevant topics, with a view to coming up with a forward-looking statement.
Tuesday 19 September

08h00 – 09h00 – Registration
In front of Room 9, second floor of the main building

9h00 – 9h15 - Opening and welcome
Welcome by Luc Weber, the Chair of the CDESR and Sjur Bergan, Head, Higher Education and History Teaching Department, Council of Europe

9h15-10h00 - Setting the scene: Approaches to and rationales for quality assurance in higher education in Europe. Presentation and discussion
Chair: Virgilio Meira Soares, member of the Bureau of the CDESR

Speakers
- Luc Weber, Chair of the Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research (CDESR)

10h00 – 10h30  - Break

10h30 – 12h00 - Role, responsibilities and means of public authorities and institutions
Chair: Virgilio Meira Soares, member of the Bureau of the CDESR

Speakers
- Alberto Amaral, Center for Research on Higher Education Policies, (CIPIES)
- Ossi V Lindqvist, Chair of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC)

12h00 – 14h00 Lunch

14h00 – 14h45 - Examples of practice with three case studies
Chair: Jean-Marc Rapp, Rector, University of Lausanne

Wednesday 20 September

09h00 – 09h45 - Introduction to Group discussions
Chair: Emlli Helle, Acting Secretary General of ENQA

The topics of all discussion groups will be introduced in a joint plenary session as follows:

Groups A and B
- Jürgen Kohler, member of the CDESR Bureau

Group C
- Peter Williams, President of ENQA

Group D
- Andrzej Rauhvargers, member of the CDESR Bureau

10h00 – 12h00 - Group Discussions

Group A QA: Role, responsibilities and means of public authorities
Chair: Jürgen Kohler
Rapporteur: Michael Höög

Group B QA: Implications for governance of institutions and systems (bilingual session)
Chair: Jean-Marc Rapp
Rapporteur: Gro Beate Vige

Group C QA and recognition of qualifications, including trans-national provisions
Chair: Andrzej Rauhvargers
Rapporteur: to be decided

Group D Implementation of the guidelines adopted by the European Ministers responsible for higher education in Bergen, May 2005
Chair: Peter Williams
Rapporteur: Hélène Lagier

12h00 – 13h30 - Lunch

13h30 – 14h30 - The use of outcomes of quality assurance
Chair: Radu Damian, Vice-Chair of the CDESR

Speaker
- Norman Sharp, Head of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (Scottish office)

14h30 – 15h30 - General Report and adoption of recommendations
Chair: Radu Damian, Vice-Chair of the CDESR

General Rapporteur
- Lewis Purser, Assistant Director (Academic Affairs), Irish Universities Association