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# Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Priorities of ENQA

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The 2009 ministerial meeting of the Bologna process was held in Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium, on 28-29 April. ENQA (the *European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education*) prepared a Position Paper for this occasion.

The Board of ENQA decided in November 2008 to prepare such a document. A Board working group of 4 persons was formed. The draft paper by the working group was discussed and revised by the Board, including advice from the former President of the Association. This revised draft was made available to the member organisations of the Association. Comments and proposals for modification were received and taken into account and the final document was made. The Position Paper was then presented to the participants of the 2009 ministerial meeting and was put on the ENQA website and distributed in hard copy form as well.<sup>1</sup>

The aim of the Position Paper is to define principles and values, and priorities, which can then serve as basis for a sound work programme for ENQA in the coming years.

The first part of the paper presents the principles and values the member organisations of ENQA adhere to. A concise list of these principles follows (Please consult the paper itself for more details.):

1. Diversity in higher education and quality assurance;
2. Harmonisation and convergence in quality assurance;
3. The European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) as an overarching framework;
4. External evaluation of quality assurance agencies;
5. Roles of internal and external quality assurance;
6. Education and research;
7. Balance of internal and external quality assurance;
8. National legislations → diverse approaches;
9. Fitness for purpose (purpose → process);
10. Co-operation of QA agencies;
11. Increasing need for information;
12. Explicit goals and methodologies;
13. Clear distribution of roles and responsibilities;
14. Dialogue.

The paper then presents the priorities ENQA members set for themselves, as follows. (Citation from the original document.)

**1. The implementation of ESG**, with particular regard to **clarification and interpretation** of terms and individual standards and guidelines. The first cycle of independent **external reviews** of ENQA member agencies in accordance with the ESG's recommendations should be complete by the end of 2010.

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<sup>1</sup> ENQA Position Paper on Quality Assurance in the EHEA in view of the Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve meeting of ministers responsible for higher education of 28 – 29 April 2009. Helsinki, 2009.  
[www.enqa.eu/files/ENQA\\_position\\_paper%20\(3\).pdf](http://www.enqa.eu/files/ENQA_position_paper%20(3).pdf)

2. **Maintaining and intensifying the co-operation between quality assurance agencies** in the EHEA, and, more widely, **continuing the dialogue within the E4 group** on quality and excellence which is of utmost importance for ENQA and for the common good of all stakeholders as well as of the general public.

3. External quality assurance processes should pay more attention to **qualifications frameworks** in general, and to intended **learning outcomes** in particular, and to the assessment of their actual attainment. Similarly, in the changing context of higher education, those processes should address the **recognition of prior learning**. ENQA will organise workshops/seminars to discuss these issues and to help members in finding the most appropriate ways and methods to fully incorporate qualifications frameworks and prior learning into their external quality assurance scrutiny schemes.

4. ENQA is willing to support EHEA's goals for **internationalisation and mobility** by exploring how they could be taken into account in the external quality assurance processes of its member agencies. ENQA will devote special effort to address more thoroughly the issue and specificities of **transnational education (TNE)** with particular regard to the external quality assurance of joint international study programmes.

5. ENQA welcomes the Charter on Lifelong Learning of EUA and wishes to express a strong interest in participating in its development and implementation. ENQA will explore possible ways of assuring **the quality of lifelong learning** through common projects with stakeholders.

6. ENQA realises that there is a steadily growing interest amongst students and all stakeholders of HE and the public at large in accessing **detailed and reliable information on the quality of individual study programmes, faculties and higher education institutions**. ENQA will address the information issue and try to work out appropriate ways to help its member agencies to meet the information demand in general.

7. ENQA, as it has done in the past, will continue to work towards the **continuous development of the staff** of its member agencies and quality assurance professionals in general. Organising workshops and seminars, promoting best practices, and serving as a think tank and information platform will remain high on the agenda of ENQA.

8. ENQA realises that in a growing number of cases the results of external quality assurance procedures are used by third parties for purposes that were not originally intended. This mismatch of design between the procedure and the usage of its results potentially compromises the value of the results of external quality assurance. To address this issue, **ENQA will develop actions devoted to helping improve awareness of all partners and stakeholders about what can be expected of sound quality assurance mechanisms** and the extent to which their outcomes are valid.

These are the priorities set by ENQA. The next task is then to put these priorities in practice. This can be done by the following steps:

1. Determining actions (making an Action Plan or Work Plan);
2. Implementing actions, producing results;
3. Dissemination, feedback;
4. Fine-tuning where needed.

Yes, this is the well-known PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle.

The 2009 ENQA General Assembly was held in Barcelona, on 28-29 September. ENQA members and associates and affiliates discussed the above priorities and agreed on the following:

- The European level policy making role of ENQA is important, it should be maintained;
- Full implementation of the ESG is needed;
- The co-operation of agencies is to be promoted;

- The E4 co-operation is to be maintained, as requested by the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué of ministers;
- Quality is a central element in the European Higher Education Area;
- Quality assurance agencies have to observe and act upon the changing context of higher education (life long learning, recognition of prior learning, transnational education, the role and importance of learning outcomes).

As to the final conclusions we can underline the preference of ENQA members of organic development against a false (forced) free market of higher education in Europe. The decisive element of this organic development should be trust. Trust in the operation of higher education institutions and trust in the activities of national and international quality assurance agencies.

ENQA should be maintaining its policy making role, should work hard and in a systematic way in the future too, and should serve as home for the QA community.