Quality assurance in higher education: European cooperation

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OBJECTIVE: The recommendation calls on the Member States to consider establishing quality assessment and assurance arrangements for their higher education systems, with a view to meeting the educational and professional requirements of the 'knowledge society'. It does not make any proposals concerning methods, structures or financing, which are matters pertaining solely to the Member States. SUBSTANCE: The following recommendations are made: 1) concerning the Member States: - to create quality assessment and assurance systems for their higher education systems, with the following objectives: . preserving the quality of higher education while taking account of the European dimension and global needs; . utilizing quality assurance techniques as guiding mechanisms to ensure the organizational flexibility of higher education establishments; . underpinning European and worldwide cooperation in the field; - to base their quality assessment and assurance systems on the following principles: . autonomy and independence of the bodies responsible for assessment (as regards both assessment procedures and methods used); . relating evaluation procedures to the profile of establishments (involving questions of institutions' understanding of themselves and their role); . organization of assessment to include the opinions of external experts and the institutions' internal comments; . involvement of all the players: internal analysis should include the views of teaching staff, administrators and students; external analysis should be based on cooperation between independent experts and persons from the establishment being assessed (experts from other Member States may take part in the assessment); alumni, the social partners and other groups should be represented in the groups of external experts; . publication of evaluation reports; - to ensure that follow-up measures are taken at national and regional level to implement plans for improving the quality of the higher education and integrating graduates more effectively into the labour market; - to exchange experiences and develop cooperation in quality assessment and assurance between Member States and with the international organizations which are active in the field. 2) concerning the Commission: - to create a 'European Quality Assurance Network' of Member State bodies and associations within the Union which are active in the field, to be responsible for: . exchange of information (via European conferences and workshops); . technical assistance to Member States in implementing concrete projects for improving quality assessment and assurance projects in the educational field; . assistance to groups of higher education institutions from different Member States wishing to cooperate in assessment projects under the Erasmus programme; . providing information on methodological developments and sound practice in relation to quality assessment and assurance procedures ('toolkits'); . linking quality assurance to other Community activities (under the Socrates, Leonardo and other programmes); . preparation of methods to achieve better integration of graduates in the European labour market. This network will receive Community support via the Socrates and Leonardo programmes. Involvement of enterprises in the process of quality assessment and assurance will be extremely welcome. A report will be submitted to the Council and the European Parliament every two years on the development of the Member States' quality assessment and assurance systems. A proposal of appropriate nature could be envisaged in relation to the reports' conclusions.