Basic information

2004/0239(COD) COD - Ordinary legislative procedure (ex-codecision procedure) Recommendation	Procedure completed
Further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education See also Recommendation 98/561/EC 1997/0121(SYN) **Subject** 4.40.04 Universities, higher education	

Key players

European Parliament	**Committee responsible**	**Rapporteur**	**Appointed**
	CULT Culture and Education	NOVAK Ljudmila (PPE-DE)	25/11/2004
Council of the European Union	**Council configuration**	**Meetings**	**Date**
	General Affairs	2705	2006-01-30
European Commission	**Commission DG**		**Commissioner**
	Education, Youth, Sport and Culture		

Key events

Date	Event	Reference	Summary
12/10/2004	Legislative proposal published	COM(2004)0642	Summary
26/01/2005	Committee referral announced in Parliament, 1st reading		
30/08/2005	Vote in committee, 1st reading		Summary
02/09/2005	Committee report tabled for plenary, 1st reading	A6-0261/2005	
12/10/2005	Debate in Parliament		
13/10/2005	Decision by Parliament, 1st reading	T6-0380/2005	Summary
13/10/2005	Results of vote in Parliament		
30/01/2006	Act adopted by Council after Parliament's 1st reading		Summary
15/02/2006	Final act signed		
15/02/2006	End of procedure in Parliament		

04/03/2006	Final act published in Official Journal		

Technical information	
Procedure reference	2004/0239(COD)
Procedure type	COD - Ordinary legislative procedure (ex-codecision procedure)
Procedure subtype	Legislation
Legislative instrument	Recommendation
Amendments and repeals	See also Recommendation 98/561/EC 1997/0121(SYN)
Legal basis	EC Treaty (after Amsterdam) EC 149-p4 EC Treaty (after Amsterdam) EC 150-p4
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	CULT/6/24247

Documentation gateway

European Parliament

Document type	Committee	Reference	Date	Summary
Committee report tabled for plenary, 1st reading/single reading		A6-0261/2005	02/09/2005	
Text adopted by Parliament, 1st reading/single reading		T6-0380/2005 OJ C 233 28.09.2006, p. 0018-0100 E	13/10/2005	Summary

Council of the EU

Document type	Reference	Date	Summary
Draft final act	03666/1/2005	15/02/2006	

European Commission

Document type	Reference	Date	Summary
Legislative proposal	COM(2004)0642	12/10/2004	Summary
Commission response to text adopted in plenary	SP(2005)4593	24/11/2005	
Follow-up document	COM(2009)0487	21/09/2009	Summary
Follow-up document	COM(2014)0029	28/01/2014	Summary

National parliaments

Document type	Parliament /Chamber	Reference	Date	Summary

Contribution	PT_PARLIAMENT	COM(2014)0029	07/05/2014	

Other institutions and bodies

Institution/body	Document type	Reference	Date	Summary
EESC	Economic and Social Committee: opinion, report	CES0387/2005 OJ C 255 14.10.2005, p. 0072-0075	06/04/2005	

Additional information

Source	Document	Date
European Commission	EUR-Lex	

Final act

EP/Council Recommendation 2006/0143
OJ L 064 04.03.2006, p. 0060-0062 Summary

Further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education

2004/0239(COD) - 12/10/2004 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE : to build upon and improve European co-operation in quality assurance in higher education

PROPOSED ACT: Recommendation of the Council and the European Parliament.

CONTENT: in 1998 the Council of Ministers adopted a Recommendation on European co-operation in quality assurance in higher education. The Recommendation requires Member States to support or establish quality assurance systems and to encourage higher education institutions to co-operate. Since 1998 much has been done to realise the objectives set out in the Recommendation. Nevertheless, more needs be done to make higher education in Europe a trustworthier brand, not only for European students but also for students from other continents seeking a higher education in Europe. To achieve this goal the Commission is proposing an updated Recommendation to encourage and facilitate the concept of "mutual recognition" in higher education. In addition, the Recommendation should act as a tool, which encourages the creation of European quality assurance systems and assessments. Five key steps have been identified for the realisation of the Recommendation's main objectives:

1) The establishment of an internal quality assurance mechanisms, which would require all higher education institutions active within their territory to introduce or develop rigorous internal quality assurance mechanisms. This step is being proposed in a bid to improve and strengthen internal quality management - or a culture of quality.

2) The establishment of a common set of standards, procedures and guidelines, requiring all quality assurance or accreditation agencies active within their territory to act independently, to apply features of quality assurance laid down in the 1998 Recommendation and to apply a common set of standards, procedures and guidelines, for assessment purposes. By standards, the Commission does not propose a set of straightjackets. Rather, standards should act as reference points, providing a common language. Such "reference points" should be updated regularly and keep pace with emerging new knowledge. By procedures the Commission proposes the publication of an ENQA Handbook of Quality Assurance Procedures. This handbook would contain a number of commonly accepted models or protocols based on good practice in Member States. Lastly, by guidelines, the Commission suggests a set of principles that ought to be respected when carrying out external evaluations. An agreed set of guidelines or principles could be established through he ENQA mandate. In addition the ENQA could help pave the way for a "Code of Principles for European Quality Assurance".

3) The establishment of a "European Register of Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agencies", to encourage quality assurance and accreditation agencies, together with organisation representing higher education. Under this step the Commission proposes that independent quality assurance agencies themselves become subject to regular review. Regular review of agencies should lead to the setting up of a European Register/List or Clearing House of Quality Assurance Agencies, covering public, private and professional agencies, operating or based within Europe. The List would cover regional, national, European or international agencies.

4) Universities would be given the freedom to choose their own agency according to their needs and profile. This might be an agency in another European country - but which would be subject to EU quality controls and should be registered on the recognised EU List outlined above.

5) Member States should accept the assessments made by all quality assurance and accreditation agencies listed in the European Register (regardless of whether they are based in their home territory or not) when making decisions regarding licensing or funding. The Commission recognises that it is the Member States who are responsible for organising their national quality systems. In some cases, however, Member States have decided to open the possibility of recognising the judgement of an agency in another European country as equivalent to the judgement of national agencies. For example, Flanders in Belgium and the Netherlands have decided to set up one joint accreditation system. This, the Commission suggests, is a positive development. It stimulates competition amongst the agencies and forces them to improve their services. Further, it would bring their evaluation and accreditation services to an international, European level. It might also lead agencies to adopt specialisations - such as engineering, medicine or humanities. Trans-national quality assurance would act as an effective tool for mutual recognition of quality assurance systems, quality assurance or accreditation assessment. Such a development could, ultimately, lead to the recognition of qualifications at a European scale, whilst leaving the initiative with universities and national authorities. Alternatively, for reasons of branding, Member States may retain national evaluations, whilst at the same time allowing higher education institutions to seek programme accreditation abroad. Without a European wide accreditation scheme in place, universities may seek to obtain labels from outside Europe including the US.

To conclude, the Commission urges an early adaptation of the proposed Recommendation. Not only would early implementation of the Recommendation give a strong impulse to the establishment of a coherent European system of quality assurance in higher education, it would also enhance quality, facilitate recognition of qualifications and promote student mobility.

Further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education

2004/0239(COD) - 15/02/2006 - Final act

PURPOSE : to build upon and improve European co-operation in quality assurance in higher education.

LEGISLATIVE ACT : Recommendation 2006/143/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education.

CONTENT : the Council adopted this recommendation by accepting all amendments suggested by the European Parliament.

It recommends that Member States :

- encourage all higher education institutions active within their territory to introduce or develop rigorous internal quality assurance systems, in accordance with the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area adopted in Bergen in the context of the Bologna Process;

- encourage all quality assurance or accreditation agencies active within their territory to be independent in their assessments, to apply the features of quality assurance laid down in Recommendation 98/561/EC and to apply the common set of general standards and guidelines adopted in Bergen, for assessment purposes. These standards should be further developed in cooperation with representatives of the higher education sector. They should be applied in such a way as to protect and promote diversity and innovation;

- encourage representatives of national authorities, the higher education sector and quality assurance and accreditation agencies, together with social partners, to set up a "European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies" (European Register) based on national review, that takes account of the principles set out in the Annex, and to define the conditions for registration and the rules for management of the register;

- enable higher education institutions active within their territory to choose among quality assurance or accreditation agencies in the European Register an agency which meets their needs and profile, provided that this is compatible with their national legislation or permitted by their national authorities;

- allow higher education institutions to work towards a complementary assessment by another agency in the European Register, for example to enhance their international reputation;

- promote cooperation between agencies in order to build up mutual trust and the recognition of quality assurance and accreditation assessments, thus contributing to the recognition of qualifications for the purpose of study or work in another country;

- ensure public access to the assessments made by the quality assurance or accreditation agencies listed in the European Register.

Lastly, the Commission is invited to continue, in close cooperation with the Member States, its support for cooperation between higher education institutions, quality assurance and accreditation agencies, competent authorities and other bodies active in the field. It is also asked to present triennial reports to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on progress in the development of quality assurance systems in the various Member States and on cooperation activities at European level, including the progress achieved with respect to the objectives referred to above.

Further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education

2004/0239(COD) - 13/10/2005 - Text adopted by Parliament, 1st reading/single reading

The European Parliament adopted the resolution drafted by Ljudmila **NOVAK** (EPP-ED, SI) making some amendments to the Commission’s proposal. Parliament approved a package of 18 compromise amendments to the Commission proposal. The compromise amendments were brokered by the

rapporteur in talks with Council and Commission ("informal trialogue") after her report had been adopted by the Education and Culture committee. (Please refer to the summary of 30/08/2005.)

Recommendation A: Member States must encourage, rather than require, all higher education institutions to introduce rigorous internal quality assurance mechanisms**,** in accordance with the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area adopted in Bergen in the context of the Bologna process.

Recommendation B: Instead of being required, as the Commission proposed, quality assurance or accreditation agencies should now be encouraged by Member States to be independent in their assessments. For assessment purposes, the agencies should apply common features of quality assurance agreed in Bergen, in such a way as to protect and promote diversity and innovation.

Recommendation C: Parliament replaced "European Register of Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agencies" by "European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies". Member States must encouragerepresentatives of national authorities, the higher education sector and quality assurance and accreditation agencies, together with social partners, to set up a "European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies" based on national review, that takes account of the principles set out in the Annex, and to define the conditions for registration and the rules for management of the register. Parliament deleted the requirement on Member States to accept the assessments by all registered agencies as a basis for decisions on licensing or funding of higher education institutions, including eligibility for student grants and loans.

Recommendation E is split into three parts:

-Member States are to allow higher education institutions to work towards a complementary assessment by another agency in the European register, for example to enhance their international reputation,

-They should promote cooperation between agencies in order to build up mutual trust and the recognition of quality assurance and accreditation assessments, thus contributing to the recognition of qualifications for the purpose of study or work in another country,

-They are to ensure public access to the assessments made by the quality assurance or accreditation agencies listed in the European register.

Finally, in the event of an initial refusal of registration, reassessment is possible on the basis of improvements made.

Further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education

2004/0239(COD) - 21/09/2009 - Follow-up document

This report discusses the progress in the development of quality assurance systems in Member States and on cooperation activities at European level, following the 2006 Recommendation.

Recall: quality assurance in higher education is at the heart of efforts to build a coherent, compatible and attractive European Higher Education Area (EHEA), in line with the objectives of the pan-European Bologna Process. The purpose of the 2006 Recommendation was to encourage higher education institutions (HEIs) to introduce or develop internal quality assurance systems and for quality assurance or accreditation agencies to apply the European Standards and Guidelines on Quality Assurance, in this area. The 2006 Recommendation invited the Commission to: (i) continue, in close cooperation with the Member States, its support for cooperation between HEIs, quality assurance and accreditation agencies, competent authorities and other bodies in the field; (ii) present triennial reports on progress in the development of quality assurance systems in the various Member States and on cooperation activities at European level.

This is the first triennial report on progress achieved. It analyses the situation at national, European and international level and suggests areas for further development.

Main conclusions: the report states that over the past few years, Europe's quality assurance system has developed enormously, both with respect to internal quality assurance in European HEIs and to external evaluation and accreditation of institutions and programmes. Many new quality assurance agencies and networks have been created, there is an increased awareness of the European Standards and guidelines on quality assurance and there are a growing number of agencies which prepare for quality assurance outside their national context.

Notwithstanding this overall positive development, the **full implementation of the 2006 Recommendation appears to require further efforts in a number of areas**.

Looking at the quality assurance infrastructure: quality assurance agencies are still a relatively new feature in the EHEA. They will need to demonstrate their independence and professionalism to build trust among stakeholders. They will further need to convince their European peers that they offer a sufficient level of comparability, which is important as a precondition for the cross-recognition of degrees and the promotion of student mobility.

The Commission is aware of the risk that agencies may have become too numerous while their size remains rather small. Therefore, the possibility of agency mergers might merit some consideration via the existing European quality assurance networks (ENQA, ECA), e.g. by regrouping agencies on the basis of regional or linguistic proximity. Agencies could also consider broadening the scope of their activities in order to deal more adequately with lifelong learning, distance, online, vocational, transnational and private higher education.

Revisiting the European Standards and Guidelines: the European Standards and Guidelines could be further developed, to make quality assurance more coherent with the development of the EHEA, as was envisaged in the 2006 Recommendation. This exercise would need to involve agencies and other quality assurance stakeholders within the Bologna Process framework. Such a development could consider the following three aspects:

1. **Complying with the main structure** (three cycles) as a basic quality requirement in the EHEA. A clearer reference in the guidelines should be given to the Diploma Supplement and the ECTS, since these are not fully implemented in most countries;
2. In the EHEA, the quality standards would encompass priorities such as **employability and mobility**;
3. The **standards for internal quality assurance systems** of HEIs might also factor in other key dimensions such as the quality of student services in general, career/employment guidance for students and alumni, the development of financial management capacity and the implementation of the European Charter for Researches and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers.

A stronger European dimension in quality assurance: the possibility for HEIs to choose from among registered agencies, as highlighted in the 2006 Recommendation, hinges on the development of a larger number of European quality seals. They could be based on broad disciplinary fields (rather than on narrow areas of professional specialisation) and awarded either by separate specialised agencies or in conjunction with national evaluations in the corresponding field. The Commission is supporting the development of initiatives of this type. National quality assurance agencies should be encouraged to develop activities beyond their borders and to seek the recognition of their decisions in other countries, e.g. through conventions of mutual recognition. HEIs could be encouraged to use the services of registered agencies outside their country. There may be a need to clarify the portability of national accreditation within the EHEA and also the issue of quality assurance for cross-border higher education within the EHEA. Given the growing importance **of joint and double degree** courses in Europe, clear principles might be useful to avoid the need for multiple accreditations.

The Commission supports the development of transparency tools complementing quality assurance, in particular those providing a comparative view on the quality of HEIs and their programmes.

Lastly, the Commission would like to invite all stakeholders to reflect on this report and to ensure the appropriate follow-up to the 2006 Recommendation. The Commission looks forward to being able to report on further progress in 2012.

Further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education

2004/0239(COD) - 30/01/2006

The Council adopted, accepting all amendments suggested by the European Parliament, a recommendation on European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education.

It recommends, in particular, that member states encourage the creation of a "European register of quality assurance agencies" and give the freedom to higher educations institutions to choose one agency among any of the agencies registered (not necessarily among the national ones).

Further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education

2004/0239(COD) - 28/01/2014 - Follow-up document

The Commission presents a report on progress in quality assurance (QA) in higher education.

Objectives of the report: the present report follows the first published in 20095, responding to the invitation from the European Parliament and Council in 2006 to report on progress in quality assurance (*for the results of the 2009 report, please refer to the summary dated 21/09/2009, in this procedure file*). The 2009 report identified the need to make **QA more efficient and transparent for users**; to link it overtly to wider higher education priorities; and to develop cross-border cooperation to improve quality – and drawing on a wide range of sources. It also highlighted the potential for quality assurance to play a more active role in supporting reform at system and institutional levels and proposes EU actions to support institutions and Member States.

Synergy between QA and HEIs: the report stresses that QA that is tailored to each higher education institution's (HEI) vision and priorities will encourage greater diversity and specialisation of HEIs and promote wider engagement with and accountability to stakeholders. The report shows that change is taking place. The remit of some QAAs is being extended to review broader higher education objectives such as **widening access, lifelong learning, internationalisation**, etc.

The large majority (69%) of QA systems now focus on a combination of institutional evaluation and programme accreditation and a growing minority have shifted to exclusively institutional evaluation. This is promising for the future direction of QA – **institutional evaluation empowers academics and HEIs to build curricula and to ensure their quality**, avoiding the need for formal, external accreditation of each individual programme and allowing them to adapt provision rapidly to changing labour market needs and to changes in the make-up of the student population.

Main findings of the report: this report demonstrates some progress since 2009, but also reveals **gaps** in how QA supports higher education reforms such as widening access, improving employability and internationalisation, or improving doctoral training and human resources strategies.

To bridge these gaps, QA has to become a support to creating an **internal quality culture rather than a tick-box procedure**. It needs to engage with all areas of an institution's activities, to keep up with change in how higher education is designed and delivered, and involve the entire institution in creating a **quality culture** that underpins teaching and learning.

The report also focuses on:

- the move between systems – both in the traditional initial education pathway and to upgrade and widen knowledge and skills throughout citizens' lives;
- the need for a sector-based approach to quality assurance and on whether it is possible to identify some basic principles and guidelines valid across sectors and applicable to all qualifications.

To address such challenges, it would be valuable to discuss QA in higher education within a comprehensive context of all instruments for transparency and quality assurance.

In that light the Commission plans to undertake the following actions towards better European cooperation in quality assurance for **lifelong learning**:

- **dialogue**: it is proposed to consult stakeholders on the findings of this report and on the need for and feasibility of improving coherence between quality assurance in different education sub-sectors;
- **reform of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)**: a thorough-going revision of the ESG is needed that lays emphasis on raising quality standards rather than on procedural approaches;
- **synergies between existing tools**: it is proposed to continue to improve the articulation of European transparency tools that support quality assurance, such as Europass;
- **cooperation and internationalisation**: it is suggested to continue to promote cooperation on QA at international level, through policy dialogue with key international partners and as a basis for partnerships with HEIs around the world (in this regard, specific actions have also been proposed in the framework of the new Erasmus+ programme).