Enhancing Quality Across Borders
Regional Cooperation in Quality Assurance in Higher Education

**An International DIES Conference
on Experiences in Europe, Southeast Asia,
South America, East Africa
and the Arab Region**

18 - 20 June 2007

**Collegium Leoninum
Bonn
Germany**

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Preface

University delegates, representatives of higher education and quality assurance networks, accrediting agencies and quality assurance bodies, ministries and donor organisations from the Arab World, the ASEAN countries, Central and South America, East Africa and Europe gathered in Bonn from 18 to 20 June 2007 to discuss regional quality assurance initiatives in higher education.

Best practices were presented, problems were identified and discussed and recommendations were made with the **Bonn Declaration on Regional Co-operation in Quality Assurance in Higher Education** adopted during the conference. Participants underlined the importance of regional cooperation in the field of quality assurance in the light of globalisation and the growing internationalisation and competitiveness of the higher education and labour markets. They highlighted that quality assurance not only contributed to improving higher education systems, promoting good governance and enhancing the relevance of study programmes, but also created mutual trust between different national systems and between different stakeholders in higher education.

The conference results have guided the work of DAAD and HRK in their efforts to support regional quality assurance initiatives. A particular focus in their joint Dialogue on Innovative Higher Education Strategies (DIES) Programme is being put on initiatives in Central America, East Africa and – starting from next year onwards – in Southeast Asia.

In the hope of further continuing and enhancing the inter- and intra-regional dialogue on quality assurance in higher education, this report provides you with the conference proceedings, including background information, conference papers, regional reports and the concluding conference recommendations.

For this 2010 edition, we have invited Maria Jose Lemaitre, former President of the Iberoamerican Network for Quality Assurance of Higher Education and current Vice-President of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education, to comment on recent developments in the field of regional quality assurance in higher education.

Marijke Wahlers

Head of International Department,
German Rectors' Conference (HRK)

Dr Anette Pieper de Avila

Head of Division Development Cooperation and Alumni Programmes, German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)

1 International Cooperation in Quality Assurance: The Role of Networks

By Maria Jose Lemaitre[1]

The Growth of Regional Networks

Quality assurance networks are becoming an increasingly active actor in the higher education field. It is interesting to map the main developments in the field and to learn about the ways in which they may be contributing to the development of a globalised quality assurance perspective.

The main players in this field are the global network INQAAHE (International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education), established in 1991, and regional and special interest networks. These networks cover most of the globe, as can be seen from the following map: INQAAHE members are located in the countries marked in red; regions covered by regional networks are circled.[2]
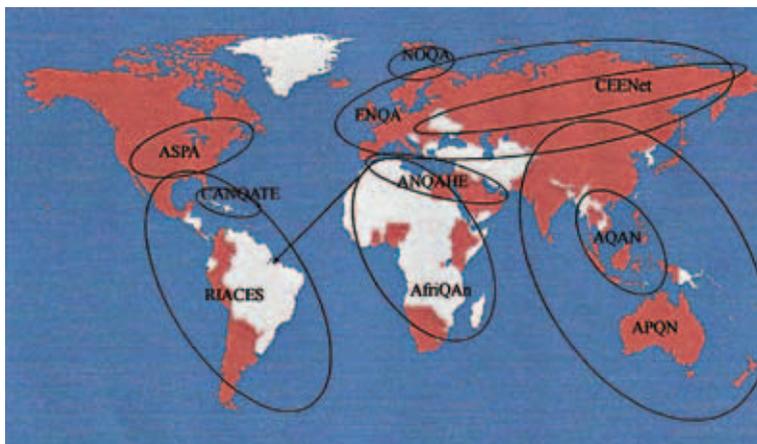
Special interest networks are developing, with the objective of addressing specific issues, such as the way in which quality assurance can be organised in small countries, or how to deal with quality assurance for open, distance or online education. These networks have not been formalised yet, but there is a certain need for specialised discussion, and currently interesting initiatives in this direction can be observed.

As can be seen from the map above, regional networks cover most of the world. They have emerged for a variety of reasons. In some cases, the drive came from geopolitical considerations. In Europe, for instance, the Bologna

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1   Maria Jose Lemaitre is the former President of RIACES and the current Vice-President of INQAAHE.

2   A list of networks is provided at the end of this article.

agreement strengthened and enlarged the role of ENQA and the development of a MERCOSUR accreditation scheme in South America provided a foundation for RIACES, the Iberoamerican Network for Quality Assurance of Higher Education. Naturally, geographical or cultural proximity plays a significant role, and the need to support the mobility of students, academic staff and eventually of professionals – normally easier within a region – has also had a significant role in the development of regional networks.

Not all regional networks correspond to a geographical criterion, however: some are based on culture and language, such as ANQAHE, the Arab network, which includes quality assurance agencies in the Middle East and in North Africa, and others are based on their specific functions, such as ASPA, the Association of Specialised and Professional Accreditors in the USA.

Recent Network Initiatives

Regional networks have been in place, sometimes for as long as a decade (such as ENQA), sometimes they have been established as recently as 2009 (such as AfriQAN). What has been accomplished so far and what is currently being done?

Regional networks have mainly focused on capacity building, in many different ways. This has been supported by the World Bank, through a development grant facility which provided resources to APQN, RIACES and ANQAHE. In 2008, the experience led to the establishment of the Global Initiative for Quality Assurance Capacity-building – GIQAC, managed by UNESCO. GIQAC has been contributing to regional networks for the last three years and has provided significant seed money for many network activities, some through direct grants (to APQN, RIACES, ANQAHE, AfriQAN and CANQATE), and some through INQAAHE.

The work being done during the last three years will be described in the following, trying to show how this exciting process is developing and contributing to an increasing professionalisation of internal and external quality assurance.

• Capacity Building Activities

Probably the most significant activity of quality assurance networks is that of capacity building. Capacity development focuses on existing and emerging quality assurance agencies, in countries where quality assurance is a new development, as well as on higher education institutions, mostly in those countries where quality assurance arrangements are non-existent or in their initial stages. While this has been promoted by the World Bank, it is also the result of the understanding that providing training for quality assurance staff members, reviewers and those responsible for quality assurance within higher education institutions is an essential component for the development of sound quality

assurance strategies. Networks have organised their capacity building efforts in a number of ways, such as internships or staff exchanges, study visits, specialised workshops and training programmes, invitations to act as observers in external review visits as well as the development of training materials.

Internships and staff exchange programs have proved to be extremely effective, both to the sending and the receiving agency. The exchange of ideas and expertise, the opportunity to visit other agencies, which in turn profit from an outsider's view of their standards and procedures, have been highlighted as a very interesting and useful form of cooperation. APQN, for example, has carried out a round of internships, whereby staff from agencies in Cambodia, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Mongolia, India, China, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka and Indonesia have visited PAASCU (Philippines), AUQA (Australia), HKCAAVQ (Hong Kong), SEEI (Shanghai) and NAA (Russian Federation). RIACES has also moved staff from most of its member agencies to Spain, Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Costa Rica and Mexico. AfriQAN is beginning its operation, and has already organised staff exchanges from Madagascar to Nigeria, Guinea Bissau to CAMES and there are plans to send staff from Sierra Leone, Cape Verde and Liberia on internships to other receiving agencies. INQAAHE has been focusing on the support of quality assurance in small states. It is currently providing internships for representatives from agencies in these countries. Four internships will take place during 2010, benefiting agencies in Samoa, Timor Leste, Rwanda and Palestine.

Internships depend very much on the willingness of the more established agencies to receive and train staff from less developed agencies. This may be a problem in some regions, where established agencies are few, and can easily be overwhelmed by the demand from other countries. An interesting example is that of ANECA in Spain and CONEAU in Argentina, which in response to a high demand, organised internships as formalised training sessions, in which all interns come in specified periods of time, take part in a workshop and observe some of the more significant activities in the receiving agency (such as an external review, a consistency meeting or a training workshop for external reviewers). This may indeed be a good way to share experience without interfering with the daily work routine too much.

Workshops, conferences and training programmes are also a very useful method for capacity building, and most networks make good use of these instruments. Most workshops are run internally, within individual networks. Conferences usually bring together experts from different networks or regions in the world, providing an important opportunity for discussion and exchange of ideas and expertise. APQN has organised workshops and training programmes in most of its member countries[3]; ANQAHE has done similar work in Syria, Egypt, Sudan, Yemen, Morocco and Jordan, to which representatives

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3   Australia, Bangladesh, China, Fiji, India, Japan, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Vietnam and Indonesia.

from most of the Arab countries have been invited. The Arab network has also worked with IIEP/UNESCO to provide a French and Arabic translation of a distance education course on quality assurance, which may be an efficient way of disseminating basic aspects of quality assurance. In turn, RIACES has organised workshops in Ecuador, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Peru, Colombia, Paraguay and Argentina, all attended by staff from most member agencies. RIACES also held a two-week course on quality assurance in a mixed mode, with some work done at a distance, and a final week-long meeting in Buenos Aires. AfriQAN has organised a meeting for the East Africa region, and will follow up with a conference later in 2010. These workshops focus on a wide range of issues, such as the management of external quality assurance, the organisation of information systems, the development and use of quality assurance materials, the training of external reviewers, or the harmonisation of quality assurance processes within the region. CANQATE holds a yearly conference, and has sponsored several training workshops for agency staff, higher education representatives and future peer reviewers.

An interesting activity is that of study tours. APQN, for instance, organised a study tour for representatives from Lao PDR to Australia and New Zealand in 2007. In 2009, RIACES organised a study visit for a group of representatives from Paraguayan higher education institutions. In a joint effort, the agencies of Paraguay and Argentina put together a programme to show university staff how universities, governmental agencies and the quality assurance agency in Argentina cooperate with the aim of improving the quality of Argentinean higher education. Interviews with academic staff, government officials and quality assurance practitioners, both at the agency and those involved in external reviews, provided a comprehensive picture of quality assurance and helped academics understand the issues involved in self-assessment, external review and accreditation.

• Harmonisation of Quality Standards and Procedures

Another aspect of regional cooperation has been the development of common quality assurance frameworks. These take a different shape and form in the different regions: ANQAHE has been working on the development of a comprehensive quality assurance framework for the Arab states, identifying and working on a set of eleven core institutional standards all agencies agree to apply. APQN members have agreed on a common framework for the region (Chiba Principles), which combines requirements for internal quality assurance and for quality assurance agencies. RIACES has also developed a set of principles of good practice for quality assurance agencies, which have been gathered in a handbook for the self-assessment of agencies, published both in Spanish and English.

An interesting development in this regard has been the work being done on the harmonisation of standards and criteria for selected programmes, working towards the mutual recognition of quality assurance processes and, eventually, of qualifications and degrees. Pioneering work in this field has been carried out by ECA in Europe, which has led to mutual recognition agreements between several European agencies. In Latin America RIACES has fed on the work carried out by MERCOSUR, which developed a regional accreditation scheme called ARCU-Sur, and has developed harmonised criteria for engineering, agronomy and medicine as well as for graduate studies in education, for distance education programmes and doctoral programmes. These have been tested through external review visits carried out by specialists from the region, and have been adjusted accordingly before submitting them to the member agencies for consideration.

Furthermore, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) have been working on a project in East Africa aiming at setting up a regional quality assurance system in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi. This joint capacity development project has been carried out since 2006 in collaboration with the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA), which draws membership from both the regulatory agencies and higher education institutions in the five East African countries. It saw a series of workshops and trainings, including the conduction of around 50 pilot self-evaluations based on a quality assurance handbook which serves as a regional QA framework and has been politically endorsed by the IUCEA during the course of this initiative.

• Evaluation of Quality Assurance Agencies

The development of common standards and procedures is the first prerequisite for an external review of quality assurance agencies at a regional level. Here, ENQA has done pioneer work, developing and applying the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), and evaluating European quality assurance agencies against them. The certification of compliance with the ESG is a significant endorsement for quality assurance agencies, and a good example for other regions of the world. ENQA has invited representatives from other regions to take part as external reviewers, thus providing opportunities for the dissemination of good reviewing practices, as well as for the analysis of the ESG and their applicability beyond the European region. In Europe, ECA has also done a significant amount of work enhancing the understanding of quality assurance standards and procedures and leading to the signing of mutual recognition agreements between agencies.

Following along this track, INQAAHE developed its Guidelines of Good Practice (GGP). It offers interested agencies the possibility to certify their alignment with the GGP either through a special review, or through any reliable external

review process. Several agencies have been certified as aligned with the GGP.[4] As mentioned above, RIACES has developed principles of good practice. Some of its member agencies are using them as the basis for self-assessment. An external review of these agencies is scheduled for the second semester of 2010.

• Exchange and Dissemination of Information, Know-How and Materials

An important part of the collaboration that takes place within and between quality assurance networks is the exchange of information and experience. Most networks have devoted time and energy to the improvement of their websites, which have become useful platforms for the publication of relevant information, originating both within and outside the region. The APQN website publishes reports and includes the good practice database of AUQA, the Australian quality assurance agency. RIACES has translated foreign materials into Spanish, and some of the materials of its own members into English, although most of the information in the website continues to be in Spanish. AfriQAN works both in English and in French, and has included some options in Portuguese.

Probably the most important work being done in this respect is the development of QAHEC, the clearinghouse organised by INQAAHE, which has mapped the sites of forty-three agencies in all regions of the world (thirty-eight countries and nineteen different languages). QAHEC makes it possible to search for the principles, policies, procedures, practices and standards of quality assurance agencies around the world. It is linked to the INQAAHE glossary, thus providing a useful guide to many key concepts in quality assurance.

A project jointly developed by INQAAHE and APQN is a database of consultants, available on the APQN website, which provides information on consultants in different fields of quality assurance. This database is an important resource for all quality assurance agencies, especially since consultants need to be drawn from all over the world.

INQAAHE also runs a query service, open to its members. Any member can send a query on a quality assurance-related topic, and the query goes to a group of volunteers who provide answers based on their knowledge and experience. Many queries have been received, on issues as varied as the treatment of conflicts of interest, the use of students in external review teams, or methods for the definition of standards.

Final Comments: Challenges for Regional Networks

The operation of regional networks has led to an increased recognition of the potential of each region to deal with the issues that affect higher education and the assurance of its quality in the specific regional context. Some of the

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4   Information on this is published on the INQAAHE website.

larger networks have particularly benefited from international cooperation, mostly through the contribution of the World Bank and UNESCO, under GIQAC. The DAAD and GTZ have also contributed to ANQAHE, and in previous years, to the development of quality assurance in Central America. These contributions, which have proved extremely helpful, provide only a fraction of the actual resources mobilised by the regions, and show that when some resources are made available, it is possible to realise a large potential for development in most regions of the world.

What do networks have to say after several years of operation? All of them report that much work has been done. In all cases, the main outcome has been the increase of links among quality assurance agencies and the promotion of regional quality assurance communities, which have learned to share a common language, to exchange ideas, experiences and expertise, and to learn from each other. Networking has been a tool for promoting communication, cooperation and mutual understanding among agencies and institutions. APQN speaks for all networks when reporting that a regional approach is an efficient and cost-effective mechanism to deliver capacity building across a wide and diverse region, especially when recognizing that while the subject of educational quality is global, the work of quality assurance, for the most part, is local.

Regional networks are faced with some significant challenges, such as maintaining the relevance and effectiveness of quality assurance in a context of reduced resources and competition from other areas for investment or expenditure, as well as their legitimacy, which largely depends on the recognition and commitment of their members.

In this respect, the main challenge for regional networks is to offer members a good service, to continue being attuned to their needs, and to be able to translate those needs into actual activities and services.

The ability of regional networks to do so depends on:

- **Governance and Administration**
  Regional networks need to develop a sustainable operational structure with an active governing board. This requires resources, time and dedication on the part of people who are usually already overworked and whose work for the network is normally ad honorem. Another essential component of the operational structure is the secretariat, which normally does not get the attention and resourcing it deserves.

- **Sustainability**
  Sustainability depends, in part, on the availability of funding. Up to now, many regional networks have enjoyed grants from the World Bank / UNESCO, through GIQAC. This has proven that a lot can be done even with limited funds. At the same time, the activities carried out under the umbrella of the GIQAC are usually embedded into the regular work of quality assurance agencies. They devote a good

part of their resources to exchange experts and enhance international cooperation. These activities are seldom recognised as part of the regional networking that is important to develop. This is the second face of sustainability: the capacity for coming together in order to share experience, exchange practices, and learn from each other. Therefore, another challenge lies in the recognition of the actual networking in place, and the need to feed these activities into programmes for the regional networks. Funding is usually available for specific projects, and if networks can bring together quality assurance agencies in order to develop joint projects, it is highly likely that they will find the necessary resources.

- **Professionalisation**

Quality assurance is turning into a professionalised field. It has developed a systematised body of knowledge, a common language, a set of standards and guidelines on reliable and recognised quality assurance procedures, and increasingly, programmes and materials dedicated to train the people working on it. At the same time, there is a high turnover of staff and policy makers, requiring a continuing capacity building effort. This is not always recognised, especially since the recognition of the need for the professionalisation of quality assurance is still weak. Regional networks can address this issue, but this entails revising and improving the way in which capacity building activities are carried out, and their continuing revision and repetition, even if they sometimes seem redundant.

- **Further Challenges**

There are other, more concrete challenges: the need to improve communication tools and mechanisms to exchange materials, to provide a platform for discussion and for sharing information in a friendlier and more effective way; the need to develop and share vocabularies and glossaries, to understand the way in which the terms and concepts related to quality assurance are used in different contexts; the need to find ways of linking quality assurance to other decisions in the realm of higher education (recognition of qualifications, student, academic and professional mobility), which requires alliances with governmental and institutional authorities.

Relation with the Global Network INQAAHE

It is important to mention the relationship between regional or specialised networks and INQAAHE, as the global network for quality assurance. It would be reasonable to assume that, as regional and specialised networks develop, the role of the global network will diminish, and eventually disappear. However, this has not been the case, as the global network has continued to grow and become stronger. This is, in part, the result of INQAAHE's new approach to

the regions, which aims at acting more as a coordinator of different networks. In order to do this, INQAAHE has provided a meeting point for the regions, which in turn, bring their specific needs and interests to a global arena. As a consequence, it is possible to address issues that are significant to a region or sub-region, and at the same time, discover that there are shared issues that cut across regions, such as cross-border higher education, the quality assurance of online or distance education or the mid- and long-term sustainability of quality assurance. INQAAHE also plays an important role as the main professional association for quality assurance, making it possible for practitioners around the world to meet as members of a global quality assurance community with shared interests, a shared view of the work they carry out, a common language and an understanding of how things are done with regard to a very specific field of work – the professional aspect of quality assurance.

Regional Networks

AfriQAN – African Quality Assurance Network for Higher Education

ANQAHE – Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

APQN – Asia Pacific Quality Network

AQAN – Asean Quality Assurance Network

ASPA – Association of Specialised and Professional Accreditors, US

CAMES– Conseil africain et malgache pour l'enseignement supérieur (African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education)

CANQATE – Caribbean Network for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education

CEENet – Central and Eastern European Networking Association

ECA – European Consortium for Accreditation

ENQA – European Association for Quality Assurance

NOQA – Nordic Quality Assurance

RIACES – Red Iberoamericana para la Acreditación de la Calidad de la Educación Superior (Iberoamerican Network for Quality Assurance of Higher Education)

2   Background Information and General Conference Objectives

As part of the Dialogue on Innovative Higher Education Strategies Programme (DIES), the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) held a conference on "Enhancing Quality Across Borders – Regional Cooperation in Quality Assurance in Higher Education" in Bonn, Germany, from 18 to 20 June 2007. Supported by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), 90 quality assurance experts from 31 countries and five continents – representing higher education institutions and networks, accrediting agencies and quality assurance bodies, ministries as well as donor organisations – came to Bonn to share their experience and exchange ideas on the development of regional quality assurance systems.

The conference was a follow-up activity to one jointly organised by the HRK and the German Accreditation Council in 2003, in which it became clear that - notwithstanding regional and local differences – the basic challenges of implementing quality assurance procedures at higher education institutions were largely similar. In this context, regional networks had proven to be effective agents of university reform in many regions.

One of the main ideas behind the conference was to share the experience accumulated in three projects in the field of quality assurance supported by the DAAD and HRK – in Central America, East Africa and in Southeast Asia. In Central America, the DAAD and HRK have supported their partners, the Central American Superior Council for Higher Education (CSUCA) and the Central American Accreditation Council (founded in 2003), in developing a Central American quality assurance system. A similar project started in East Africa in 2006, where the DAAD has supported the Inter-University Council of East Africa (IUCEA) in starting a regional quality assurance initiative (Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda). At the same time, the HRK has supported the ASEAN University Network (AUN) in the development of a manual for the implementation of quality assurance guidelines in the Southeast Asian region.

The main goal behind all three regional initiatives was and is to promote the development of a regional quality assurance system. Whereas international quality assurance networks mainly serve to exchange experience and to

draw up codes of good practice, regional quality assurance systems aim to develop joint quality assurance manuals, to synchronise self-evaluations and peer reviews, and to develop basic standards. A long-term goal may even be the establishment of a regional quality assurance body, involving governmental as well as non-governmental stakeholders. By enhancing transparency with regard to the quality and relevance of degree programmes and by harmonising quality assurance procedures trust is being built up across borders.

Similar movements can be observed in other world regions, such as the European initiative for shared quality assurance standards in the European Higher Education Area, supported by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA). In Europe, the Bergen Communiqué of European ministers responsible for higher education has set the agenda. It states that even though most European countries "have made provision for a quality assurance system (…) there is still progress to be made, in particular as regards (…) international cooperation". While international cooperation needs to be further promoted, various European initiatives, such as the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" adopted at Bergen and the European register of quality assurance agencies currently being developed, might provide interesting models for other world regions and will form a solid basis for further inter-regional cooperation in quality assurance.

In the Arab region, regional benchmarking has been introduced and the establishment of an Arab Institute for Quality Assurance is currently being discussed. On the global scale, the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) offers a platform for mutual exchange and learning.

The conference aimed to achieve the following overarching objectives:

- to exchange information on goals, strategies and working methods of regional quality assurance networks (exchange of good practices);
- to exchange strategies for the step-by-step evolution from regional networks into regional systems of quality assurance;
- to discuss strategies on how to improve the employability and mobility of graduates, e.g. by involving professional stakeholders in regional quality assurance;
- to strengthen the autonomous role of higher education institutions in regional quality assurance procedures;

- to strengthen regional quality assurance networks or systems in different world regions and to discuss strategies for sustained funding;
- to build trust among regional quality assurance networks, thus creating a pool of international peers and promoting the internationalisation of quality assurance in higher education;
- to identify common aims and tasks and to promote cooperation between regional networks.

Key issues discussed during the conference were how the various regional quality assurance initiatives could learn from the best practices presented, e.g. with regard to the timing of activities within a dynamic approach, the balance of university autonomy and the participation of external stakeholders, and the integration of students into quality assurance procedures. The conference also discussed how cooperation within a region could improve the independence of quality assurance decisions and increase the efficiency of quality assurance processes, and how comparable and transparent joint criteria for quality assurance procedures in higher education could be drawn up within a region, thus promoting joint quality assurance procedures and/or mutual recognition of quality assurance decisions. A further important issue related to the question of how donors could promote regional quality assurance initiatives, e.g. by supporting the introduction of quality assurance mechanisms as a regional public good (dialogue, training and consultancy), by furthering development from networks to systems, and by linking scholarships and funding to quality assurance decisions.

Representatives of the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) as well as the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) of UNESCO presented various capacity building and support schemes in the field of quality assurance with a view to highlighting opportunities for conference participants to translate some of the conference recommendations into concrete action.

Discussion on what role the different types of networks played in promoting regional cooperation was both instructive and fruitful. With networks of quality assurance agencies – aiming to develop and improve external quality assurance (such as INQAAHE, ENQA, ECA, RIACES, and the Arab States Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) – on the one hand, and university networks – with the main aim of developing a quality culture and internal quality assurance systems within the institutions (such as the ASEAN University Network, the Inter-University Council of East Africa, and the European University Association) – on the other, a wide range of networks

were represented. In this context, the dynamics of networks developing into sub-regional systems, e.g. in Central America, were also discussed. Since internal quality assurance and external quality assessment are two sides of the same coin, the conference organisers regarded it as crucial to build bridges between and within the various regional networks. At the final conference session, the Bonn Declaration on Regional Cooperation in Quality Assurance in Higher Education was adopted by the conference participants.

3   Bonn Declaration on Regional Cooperation in Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Adopted on 20 June 2007 during the Conference "Enhancing Quality Across Borders – Regional Cooperation in Quality Assurance in Higher Education" organised by the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)

Participants from the Arab World, the ASEAN countries, Central and South America, East Africa, Europe, plus representatives of regional and international organisations gathered in Bonn from 18 to 20 June 2007 for the Conference "Enhancing Quality Across Borders – Regional Cooperation in Quality Assurance in Higher Education" organised by the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) as part of the Dialogue on Innovative Higher Education Strategies programme (DIES) to discuss developments in quality assurance and how to promote further cooperation.

Participants underlined the importance of regional cooperation in the field of quality assurance. While quality and quality assurance in higher education are primarily seen as the responsibility of higher education institutions, it is for national governments and/or quality assurance agencies to set requirements at national level. However, participants highlighted the importance of regional cooperation in the light of globalisation and the growing internationalisation and competitiveness of the higher education and labour markets.

Participants welcomed the various initiatives for capacity building in quality assurance, such as the new Global Initiative for Quality Assurance Capacity (GIQAC) taken by the World Bank to provide support for a variety of regional capacity building activities tailored to the needs of the region and taking into account differences in the cultural, legal and political contexts.

I. Rationale

Regional cooperation in quality assurance is seen as essential for the following reasons:

- Quality assurance is not an end in itself but should rather contribute to improving higher education systems and promoting good governance. It will enhance the relevance of programmes, employability and the student experience. Additionally quality assurance must contribute to solving regional and global problems.

- Quality assurance is a key element in promoting the mobility of students as well as of academic staff and graduates.

- The basic prerequisite for improved mobility is that degrees are recognised in the region. The mutual recognition of accreditation and evaluation decisions is needed to facilitate both the mobility of students as well as the recognition of degrees. Regional cooperation promotes the idea that countries are looking at quality in comparable ways, are applying comparable methodologies and will in future apply comparable standards.

- Regional cooperation in quality assurance promotes the transparency of higher education systems and of the programmes they offer, making benchmarking possible.

- Regional cooperation in quality assurance makes it possible to have independent external assessment, especially for small higher education systems.

- Regional cooperation, promoting internal quality assurance and external quality assessment will make quality more visible. This provides donor organisations with a higher degree of clarity when making funding decisions.

- Regional quality assurance contributes to increasing mutual trust between different national systems as well as between different stakeholders in higher education. Therefore, the involvement of stakeholders (institutions, governments, employers, employees, students) is of the utmost importance. Regional cooperation in quality assurance should facilitate the cooperation of one region with other world regions as well as international players.

II. Recommendations

In the light of the above-mentioned rationale, participants made the following recommendations:

- Institutions of higher education are called upon to develop and put into place a sustainable and continuously operational internal quality assurance system (IQA system) in line with international developments and standards. Regional experience in Central and South America, East Africa, the Arab countries, the ASEAN countries and Europe can be useful in this process.

- National and regional quality assurance bodies, be they public or professional organisations, are advised to align the accreditation processes, the accreditation frameworks and the accreditation standards in such a way that accreditation decisions are recognised within the region. It is furthermore recommended that the accrediting bodies apply the criteria for reliable quality assurance agencies, including the use of peer review in quality assessment, the involvement of stakeholders and independence from other organisations.

- The International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the European Consortium on Accreditation (ECA), UNESCO, the International Association of University Presidents (IAUP), and the Ibero-American Network for the Accreditation of Quality in Higher Education (RIACES) are recommended to work towards coordinating the principles of good practice and guidelines that have been developed for a reliable quality assurance agency.

- National and regional university associations are called upon to support their member institutions in the process of developing IQA systems by making the necessary knowledge and instruments available and by organising training sessions and workshops.

- The ministers responsible for higher education are recommended to contribute to the development of regional quality assurance and to promote the harmonisation of accreditation by making a clear distinction between accreditation as a professional activity and the consequences connected with obtaining or failing to obtain accreditation. The latter is the prerogative of national governments and in some countries of public universities and/or professional organisations. Furthermore, they can contribute to such initiatives by assuring adequate funding and by removing obstacles to regional quality assurance initiatives.

- Donor organisations, such as the World Bank, Regional Development Banks, the European Union and national development cooperation institutions, are advised to support the idea of regional quality assurance as regional public goods. Against this background they are advised to support projects to develop IQA systems as well as national or regional external quality assurance systems. Furthermore they should support capacity building for regional programme assessments for benchmarking and transparency, plus projects aimed at harmonising accreditation and external quality assurance in a region.

- Participants are aware of the rich diversity of quality assurance in the various regions. However, in the last few decades a certain body of knowledge on quality assurance in higher education has been built up. To support the above-mentioned recommendations it should be possible to take stock of the basic knowledge available on quality assurance. Therefore UNESCO, in cooperation with stakeholders and other relevant organisations, is invited to investigate the possibility of compiling and translating this body of knowledge, possibly in a manual on quality assurance in higher education. Use can be made of the various examples and initiatives that exist at national and regional levels.

- In general, it is recommended that institutions of higher education, university associations, quality assurance bodies and other stakeholders (governments, students, employers, employees) in a region develop regional programme assessments, thereby making benchmarking and transparency of the disciplines in the region possible.

- It is recommended that all stakeholders involved in the quality assurance of higher education systems start developing innovative and sustainable programme assessment and programme quality assurance methods.

- INQAAHE and other networks of quality assurance agencies are encouraged to cooperate with the university networks as well as with students and other stakeholders in order to foster the implementation of the above-mentioned recommendations.

Against the background of this declaration on Regional Cooperation in Quality Assurance in Higher Education, endorsed in the final plenary session on 20 June 2007, participants reaffirm their commitment to furthering cooperation and discussion in order to reach the goals set out in this document.

Annex: Recommendations of Regional Working Groups

Looking at the developments in the various regions, a number of specific needs have been formulated and specific recommendations made for the regions:

Latin America

Standards of quality assurance should be consistent within and across the region in order to strive for comparable quality decisions. At the same time they must be flexible enough to take into account national and institutional needs and differences. A strong emphasis should be placed on building institutional and individual quality assurance capacities within higher education institutions, quality assurance agencies and other related organisations.

East Africa

The Inter University Council for East Africa (IUCEA) and higher education regulatory agencies in East African member states commit themselves to strengthening their Higher Education Area (The East African Higher Education Area) characterised by harmonised quality assurance benchmarks and standards set in accordance with the framework being developed by the various stakeholders.

Southeast Asia

Recognising the contribution that quality assurance in higher education makes to a culture of excellence, good governance and mutual understanding as well as the importance of regional cooperation for harmonisation of and in higher education, the working group agrees on the following:

- At policy level, to make the quality assurance and regional sharing activities visible to the ASEAN ministers and the ASEAN-EU minister meetings. This aims to generate mutual recognition and understanding among the political leaders for the regional educational initiatives taking place
- To encourage participation from within ASEAN and other regional groupings as observers at the AUN-QA workshops and assessment exercises
- To promote regional cooperation with external assessment bodies.

The Arab Region

Activities in the area of quality assurance and accreditation in the Arab region have now reached the point of institutionalisation at three levels:

- Establishment of quality assurance structures within countries at national level and within universities
- Emergence of the UNDP Higher Education Project as a voluntary network of collaborating universities and UNESCO initiatives on coordinating national agencies in the region
- The recent formation of the Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
- The next phase of development should focus on consolidation and coordination between these levels with the support of the responsible ministers of education and in dialogue with international donors.

Europe

The working group from Europe focused discussion on how cooperation with other regional networks can be further enhanced in the future. The group addressed the question in view of the major obstacles to such enhancement. The question is very complex but two major obstacles, among others, can be identified. One of them is political: who is responsible for building networks between regions? Has a will for building networks been expressed specifically at ministry level in the various countries? In countries with many external players within quality assurance: do networks exist between these quality assurance organisations and the universities that can address questions of regional cooperation? Who will and can take the national initiative for networking between international regions?

The other major obstacle is the language barrier. In most countries in Europe the working language is the native language. However, the best, or maybe the only, way of promoting broad international cooperation is to participate in joint projects between countries and regions. To be able to achieve this, countries that want to start cooperation must agree on a common working language. Experience from countries that have agreed on using a foreign language as the working language proves that something is lost in the process. On the other hand, experience also shows that more is gained by cooperating with foreign experts through the transfer of knowledge between countries and regions. However, the use of a foreign language can be an obstacle, even at the political level, that first has to be overcome.

4 Regional Cooperation Initiatives

4.1 The Current Status of Regional Networks for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

By Ton Vroeijenstijn

The conference addressed the topic of "Enhancing Quality across Borders – Regional Cooperation in Quality Assurance in Higher Education". To gain an idea of what is happening, it is important to see which networks are active and which developments of regional cooperation are visible. Because initiatives on regional developments are often made by specific networks, it is important to discuss the role of the networks regarding regional developments. This is why it was an advantage to have the various types of networks together at the conference:

- Networks of quality assurance agencies (which might involve external quality assessment or accreditation) aimed at developing and improving external quality assurance. Examples include the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA), the Arab States Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE), and the Ibero-American Quality Assurance Network (RIACES).
- Networks of Higher Education Institutions that mainly aim to develop a quality culture and internal quality assurance in their institutions. Examples are the ASEAN University Network (AUN), the Inter-University Council of East Africa (IUCEA), and the European University Association (EUA).

Of course, the division into two types is not as black and white as pictured above. The quality assurance networks often work together with the universities, and the university networks work closely with the quality assurance agencies. It was good to have both types of network at the conference, because internal quality assurance and external quality assessment are two sides of one and the same coin. If we strive to enhance quality across borders we must work both on the quality culture within higher education institutions and on developing external quality assurance.

Regional Quality Assurance Networks

A look at the networks of quality assurance agencies shows that there are several regional networks plus one global network. The player at global level is the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). This network was established in 1991 and currently has 139 members, covering 79 countries. The main purpose of the network is to collect and disseminate information on current and developing theory and practice in the assessment, improvement and maintenance of quality in higher education. An important result of the INQAAHE work is to be seen in the definition of guidelines of good practice to be applied by quality assurance agencies all over the world. Furthermore, INQAAHE plays a role in stimulating and supporting regional networks. At the moment, the following regional networks for quality assurance exist:

- The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)
- The Network of Central and Eastern European Quality Assurance (CEEN)
- The Asia-Pacific Quality Network (AQPN)
- The African Quality Assurance Network (AfriQAN)
- The Caribbean Area Network for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education (CANQATE)
- The Ibero-American Quality Assurance Network (RIACES)
- The Eurasian Quality Assurance Network (EQAN)
- The Arab States Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE)

INQAAHE aims to involve all quality assurance agencies all over the world and to open up global discussion on quality assurance. However, so far the global scale is proving to be a step too far. The differences between the different parts of the world are too big for a global discussion. Therefore, we see the rise of regional networks. The origin of the regional networks is based on geopolitical factors. In the regional setting, the countries often already have a lot in common. The countries have often reached a consensus on the need to share experience(s) in the development of quality assurance in the specific region. Looking at the regional networks, we see that all aim to achieve the same goals, but in the specific regional setting. Some of the networks have already gained a lot of experience; others are just starting up the cooperation.

One of the more advanced networks at this moment is the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). ENQA was established in 2000 to promote European cooperation in the field of quality

assurance. In November 2004, the General Assembly transformed the Network into the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). The idea for ENQA originates from the European Pilot Project for Evaluating Quality in Higher Education (1994-95), which demonstrated the value of sharing and developing experience in the area of quality assurance. An important result of ENQA is to be seen in the publication of the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area". The Network of Central and Eastern European Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEEN) started independently from ENQA, but now works in close cooperation with ENQA. Looking at the development of the European Higher Education Area, it is expected that ENQA and CEEN may merge. A third network active in Europe is the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA), whose main aim is to achieve the mutual recognition of national accreditation decisions.

The Ibero-American Quality Network (RIACES), established in 2002, plays an important role in the exchange of information and in supporting the development of quality assurance in Latin America. RIACES is very active. It is a pity that the documents and the website are only available in Spanish. This makes it difficult for other regions to see what is going on and to learn from good practices.

The regional networks in Asia, Africa and the Arab world are still very young. They will play an important role in the course of national and regional developments. Naturally, they can build on the experience(s) in other regions and adapt it to their own needs. INQAAHE can play an important role in coordinating the activities of the networks and can stimulate developments. In his keynote address to the conference, Peter Cheung said that the time for discussing why quality assurance is needed is over. The discussion is now on how it can and should be done. The best way forward is to develop quality assurance in a national and regional setting. However, we are living in a global village. If quality assurance is to be effective, there must be a certain consistency and a certain approach that allows our regional quality assurance and accreditation decisions to be recognised in other regions, too. Regional networks can act more effectively because the members share the same cultural background and because it is easier to cope with neighbours. Nevertheless, a global network like INQAAHE can play a role in developing good practices and in developing a common understanding.

Regional Networks for Higher Education Institutions

Not only quality assurance agencies are networking. Higher education institutions, too, are cooperating in a regional setting. The main aim of this type of network is to promote higher education in the region and to develop a quality culture and internal quality assurance system in the institutions themselves. The following networks were present at the conference:

- The European University Association (EUA)
- The European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE)
- The ASEAN University Network (AUN)
- The Inter-University Council of East Africa (IUCEA),
- The Consejo Superior Universitario Centralamericano (CSUCA)

Looking at regional initiatives it must be said that three university networks are playing an important role in their respective region. CSUCA has contributed to setting up the Central American Accreditation Council (CCA). The ASEAN University Network (AUN) has drawn up guidelines and standards for the universities in the ASEAN region and has published a manual for the implementation of the guidelines and standards. The Inter-University Council of East Africa (IUCEA) is involved in the development of a Quality Assurance Handbook for East African universities that would spell out the objectives and goals of a common East African Quality Assurance Framework, establish appropriate quality assurance instruments, define quality assurance and give benchmarked standard guidelines for university core activities. The Handbook would then be distributed to all universities in East Africa as a common quality assurance instrument.

The European University Association (EUA) and the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) also play a role in the discussion on the development of quality assurance in their region. Both the EUA and EURASHE particularly aim to improve the quality culture in the institutions. External quality assurance and accreditation must be seen in the light of the institutions themselves being responsible for quality. ENQA, EUA, EURASHE and ESIB (the National Unions of Students in Europe) together form the so-called E4 group. Each year, the four organisations jointly organise a Quality Assurance Forum to discuss developments in the field of quality assurance.

From Regional to Global Initiatives

It is clear that all the networks are working in their own specific regional context. It is also clear that regional cooperation has to be looked at in its political and cultural context. What is done in Europe cannot be copied directly to Africa, Asia or the Arab world. However, all regions face the same basic question: How can quality assurance in higher education be stimulated, especially when considering the challenges of globalisation and internationalisation? Globalisation and internationalisation mean that all networks have to act regionally in the first instance, but at the same time have to think globally: Is what is needed regionally and what is developed regionally, also acceptable internationally and globally? This applies especially to definitions of quality, standards and criteria.

As long as quality assurance and accreditation are applied in the country in question only and as long as quality assurance is limited to national borders, there is no problem with definitions of the quality, standards and methodology applied. As long as national players agree on what is done, it is ok. However, as soon as students and graduates start crossing borders, the situation changes. Others start asking questions about our quality and about our quality label. Our quality concept will be scrutinised. How we assess our quality will be discussed. The standards we use will be the subject of debate. This all means that a quality assurance system no longer only has a national dimension, but also an international one.

The globalisation and internationalisation of higher education makes it necessary for a quality label to have an intrinsic value, also recognised outside the country. Although ISO certification as such cannot be applied to quality assurance in higher education, we can learn something from ISO. The worldwide ISO-certification organisation, based on regional and national ISO-certification authorities, has agreed on standards and methodology in such a way that the ISO-certificate awarded in Kenya is in line with the ISO-certificate of Brazil, Germany or Central America. Of course, it is much easier to standardise the ISO-standards and the certification process than standardising quality assurance in higher education. Higher education is not waiting for standardisation. Instead, we must look at harmonising quality assurance in higher education. Harmonisation does not mean uniformity, but does mean bringing quality assurance in the various countries and regions in line with some generally accepted principles.

The value of the networks is that experience exchange and good practice(s) are helping us to discover what the national approaches have in common and what can be considered as generally accepted principles. Naturally, there will always be people who say that the situation in their country is different and that there is very little that is comparable. However, a glance at the developments in quality assurance in higher education over the past 25 years shows that it is possible to define a common framework for quality assurance in higher education that can be used in all countries and regions. Steps can already be seen in that direction. Several networks (INQAAHE, ENQA, ECA, IAUP) are active in the development of a code of good practice or requirements for a reliable external quality assurance agency. The ASEAN University Network (AUN-QA) has drawn up guidelines and standards for internal quality assurance and has endorsed the manual for implementing the guidelines and providing instruments for internal quality assurance. The IUCEA also recently endorsed the handbook "A Road Map to Quality", providing the universities with a theoretical background to quality assurance and the instruments to evaluate the quality. Both the AUN-QA manual and the IUCEA handbook contain chapters to discuss and promote the harmonisation of accreditation in the region. Developments in Central America also

show that it is possible to build quality assurance in higher education on the basis of a common framework. There is a need for information that helps universities understand the phenomenon of quality and quality assurance, and a need for instruments that enable them to evaluate their own quality within the scope of self-assessment. On the other hand, we see the need for external quality assurance agencies to develop internationally accepted activities and to mutually recognise each other's accreditation decisions.

Internal quality assurance (IQA) and external quality assessment (EQA) are two sides of the same coin. Therefore, the networks for EQA-agencies and the networks for universities must work together on making the body of knowledge of internal quality assurance and external quality assessment available to all players in the field of quality assurance. It certainly is possible to synthesise the basic body of knowledge on quality assurance in higher education in a handbook for quality assurance in higher education to be used as a benchmark and a frame of reference for the development of internal quality assurance within an institution or for external quality assessment by an outside body. Clearly, in practice, such a handbook must be adapted to the region, to the country and to the institution, just like the AUN-manual has a specific Asian flavour and the IUCEA handbook a specific East African flavour.

Certainly, there will be problems before such a body of knowledge is accepted as a common framework. To mention but some of these:

- National politics: Because funding is in many cases a matter of national governments, governments do see accreditation as a prerogative of the state. It is difficult for governments to trust something from outside, and they are afraid of losing control over higher education. It would help if we could spell out that it is important to make a clear distinction between accreditation, on the one hand (= providing the quality label as a professional activity) and the consequences of accreditation, on the other. This last point is a political decision and belongs to the realm of national governments.

- National prejudice "My quality is better and there is a need to establish my standards, or else my quality will be corrupted". We have to bear in mind that the body of knowledge tells us what quality indicators or criteria are important for the evaluation and assessment of quality. It says nothing about the level at which those criteria have to be met. This depends very much on the context.

- Cultural and political differences

- Language problems

Although a lot still remains to be done, we can be optimistic about the future when we look back at what has been achieved over the past 25 years. In terms of quality assurance in higher education, quality is now high on the agenda of all stakeholders and players, and a growing quality culture plus efficient quality assurance systems can already increasingly be found at higher education institutions.

It is a challenge for the networks of quality assurance agencies and the networks of higher education institutions to use the experience(s) from and in the different regions in order to develop a worldwide accepted framework of quality assurance in higher education and a worldwide accepted framework of accreditation at national or regional level. There is enough basic knowledge present to develop a generally accepted framework. There is enough experience present to develop a generally accepted methodology. What is needed is goodwill on the part of all the participants to overcome national and regional prejudice.

4.2 Central America: The Central American Quality Assurance System

The Central American Quality Assurance System is a two-layer, multinational and multi-sectoral system. It includes stakeholders and universities from 7 countries: Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama. It also includes direct participation by public universities, private universities, ministries of education, and professional bodies (university graduates) from the whole region.

At various levels of the system it also includes participation by the National Organisations for Science and Technology, the Academy of Sciences and, to a much lesser extent, participation by representatives from the business sector. It might also extend its geographical scope to include another country, the Dominican Republic, since the main university of that country has become a member of the CSUCA.

It is a two-layer system. One layer includes the Central American Accreditation Council (CCA), which is in charge of setting good practice principles for accreditation and standards for the accreditation organisations that operate

in the region. The Council is responsible for carrying out the meta-evaluation of the accreditation agencies and their procedures, and for the regional recognition or accreditation of the accreditation agencies. The second layer includes the accreditation bodies themselves, which are responsible for accrediting the universities and/or their degree programmes.

Two main kinds of accreditation bodies or agencies are responsible for accreditation at degree programme or university level. Firstly, the regional (Central American) level usually includes specialised accreditation agencies, such as ACAAI (accrediting engineering and architecture programmes, 2006), ACESAR (accrediting agriculture, food and natural resources management programmes, 2005), ACAP (accrediting postgraduate degree programmes, PhD, MSc, MA, and professional specialist programmes, 2006), AUPRICA (accrediting private universities only, and only at institutional level, 1990). Secondly, the national level of usually non-specialised accreditation agencies, such as SINAES (in Costa Rica, 1998), CdA (in El Salvador, 1998), CONEAUPA (in Panama, 2006), and more recently CNEA (in Nicaragua, 2007).

This is a very young regional quality assurance system. The main organisation, the CCA, was formally established at the end of 2003, and the majority of the accreditation bodies have been founded since.

4.3 East Africa: The Standing Committee on Quality Assurance of the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA)

In September 2005 the IUCEA Governing Board observed that there was a need to establish an East African Quality Assurance Framework. To steer this process, the IUCEA Secretariat, in November 2005, set up a committee consisting of senior university administrators and CEOs of the national quality assurance regulatory and accreditation (QARA) agencies in the three East African countries. In its initial meetings the committee found that there was a need to take on quality assurance issues at regional level based on identifiable quality benchmarks for East Africa. Hence, there was a need to establish a common East African quality assurance framework to monitor and address the ongoing rapid expansion of higher and cross-border education in East Africa. The Committee therefore recommended that the IUCEA

should establish forums to discuss the process for creating a regional quality assurance framework so that the latter is internalised within the institutions themselves. Thus, in March 2006, the IUCEA Governing Board established an East African Quality Assurance Standing Committee that would advise the Governing Board on all quality assurance issues within a regional framework, and would promote and constantly review quality assurance mechanisms in East African universities.

In January 2006, the DAAD sponsored 30 senior university managers and QARA administrators from the three East African countries (Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda) for a two week visit to various German universities so as to introduce them to aspects of a regional quality assurance framework as practised by European countries within the Bologna Process. As a follow-up to the visit to Germany, the IUCEA and DAAD organised a regional workshop in Nairobi, Kenya in June 2006, involving ministers and other politicians, top university managers, CEOs of the national QARA agencies, some academics from all three countries and some quality assurance experts from other countries within Africa and beyond. One of the outcomes of the workshop was the decision to address the need to harmonise university quality assurance regulatory and accreditation by establishing a common quality assurance framework in East Africa, whose adoption would be purely voluntary. Furthermore, it was decided that a regional quality assurance office responsible for setting uniform higher education benchmark quality standards for all universities should be established, preferably within the IUCEA. It was therefore recommended that IUCEA should prepare a Quality Assurance Handbook for East African universities to clearly communicate the objectives and goals of a common East African Quality Assurance framework, establish appropriate quality assurance instruments, define quality assurance, and provide benchmark standard guidelines for university core activities. The Handbook would then be distributed to all universities in East Africa as a common quality assurance instrument.

The Quality Assurance Handbook has already been prepared and is in the final editorial stages. The IUCEA Governing Board has formally endorsed the Handbook and the final draft has been distributed to all IUCEA member universities for final comments. The Handbook focuses on supporting East African universities in implementing good quality assurance practices, on applying similar standards and criteria, as formulated by competent authorities, on developing an adequate internal quality assurance system that fits international developments in higher education, and on enabling universities to discover their own quality by offering internal self-assessment instruments.

The Handbook covers the common denominators of higher education quality assurance practices for East Africa, in a broad and general approach. The quality assurance instruments described in the Handbook will have to be adapted to the national context of each country, to each university's

own situation and to the specifics of a particular faculty or programme. The Handbook emphasises that the IUCEA is in no way trying to impose the Handbook upon universities in East Africa. The use of the Handbook and the application of its ideas will be absolutely voluntary. However, being an IUCEA member also means that the universities should try to apply the membership rules, including adoption of the Handbook. Moreover, it is expected that the ambition to gain international recognition will motivate universities to adopt it.

4.4 Southeast Asia: The Working Group on Quality Assurance of the ASEAN University Network (AUN)

The ASEAN University Network for Quality Assurance (AUN-QA) was initiated at the 4th AUN Board of Trustees meeting held in Myanmar in 1998 and became an important priority for the AUN, particularly in the dimensions of teaching, learning, and management. At the 9th AUN Board of Trustees Meeting held in Bangkok in 2000, the collective commitment of all the AUN Member Universities was demonstrated in the Bangkok Accord on AUN-QA to chart ASEAN's future quality improvement within the network. The Accord provides a guideline for promoting the development of a quality assurance system as an instrument for maintaining, improving and enhancing teaching, research and the overall academic standards of AUN member universities.

A Network of Chief Quality Officers (CQOs) from the AUN member universities has since met regularly over the past nine years. After holding 6 workshops, they drew up Quality Assurance Guidelines and a Manual. At the 7th AUN-QA Workshop hosted by Burapha University in May 2007, the workshop agreed on a small team to refine the checklist for use in the assessment exercises at the AUN Member Universities. The workshop confirmed the following assessment schedule:

- December 2007   University of Malaya
- June 2008   De La Salle University
- December 2008   University of Indonesia
- June 2009   Universiti Brunei Darussalam
- December 2009   Vietnam National University-Ho Chi Minh

Recently, the AUN agreed to conduct the 8th AUN-QA Workshop at the University of Malaya from 12 to 14 December 2007. The CQOs' assessor team will run the actual assessment of engineering programmes and the AUN-CQOs will attend to gain experience from the actual assessment and process to discuss the next step for AUN-QA.

To set the future direction, the AUN agreed to draft the AUN-QA Plan of Action to strengthen cooperation between the Member Universities and other bodies in ASEAN member countries. The Plan of Action will focus on:

- Assessing the programme level to support student mobility in the region;
- Strengthening the AUN-QA system to make it compatible with national accreditation systems; and
- Benchmarking with international quality assurance agencies in higher education to improve quality by aiming for international recognition.

4.5   The Arab Region

4.5.1 The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Higher Education Project

Launched in 2002, the Higher Education Project aims to introduce, in partnership with a core group of leading public and private Arab universities, three internationally-based quality assurance instruments: the internal and external evaluation of academic programmes, the evaluation of student performance through international tests, and the development of a statistical database for participating universities.

The regional project has now embarked upon its fourth regional cycle of internal and external reviews of academic programmes at Arab universities. Following the cycle of programme reviews in the field of Computer Science at 15 universities (2002-2003), Business Administration at 16 universities (2003-2004) and Education at 23 universities (2005-2006), the project's fourth cycle of academic reviews was launched earlier this month for Engineering programmes at 19 universities. It is estimated that almost 50% of all Arab undergraduates are enrolled in these four fields of study.

Primary emphasis is on capacity building, where the project provides training and advisory support to academic representatives of each participating university who are trained to lead the process of self-evaluation and to prepare the self-evaluation documents in their own departments. Around two-thirds of these representatives are selected to participate in external reviews in countries other than their own, alongside registered reviewers from the Quality Assurance Agency in the UK. Altogether, more than 110 representative academics received the full training and participated in the self-evaluation process (of whom 71 also acted as external reviewers). This is perhaps the first cohort of fully-trained reviewers in the region. Feedback received by the project indicates that most of these trained reviewers are now playing leading roles in the development of quality assurance systems in their countries. The size of this cohort is expected to exceed 100 with the completion of the current cycle of engineering reviews.

In addition to capacity building and introducing methods of internal and external evaluation for programmes, the review cycle also generates agendas for improving and reforming each participating programme, which is documented in the final review report and delivered to each university upon completion of the cycle. In addition, a regional overview report is also produced and distributed publicly. This report identifies patterns of weakness and strength that emerge across the region in the subject under review, and recommends areas of strategic consultation and collaboration at regional level.

With regards to testing students, the Major Field Test (MFT) offered by Educational Testing Services (ETS - USA) has been adopted to test the performance of the senior (graduating) students of the reviewed programmes. More than 1800 senior students of the reviewed programmes in Computer Science and Business Administration were tested in English, Arabic and French, depending on the language of instruction in each programme. The MFT test in education was significantly modified to replace culturally-biased questions and was produced in Arabic through a joint technical collaborative effort between the project and ETS. By the end of this month (June 2007), the test will have been held for about 1500 senior students of Education programmes at the participating universities. Other universities in the region are showing an interest in using the test as a means of assessing the performance of their students and the currency of their curricula. Parallel to the review and testing components, the project has, in partnership with 15 of the participating universities (of about half a million students), built a pilot statistical database that has been compiled in accordance with internationally-based methodologies and common data definitions and specifications. The aim of this initiative is to develop a model for the collection and dissemination of management information that can be adopted by universities in the Arab world. The compiled data cover programme, staff and student demographics and finances. A regional report is now ready for publication, and will be released for public distribution by the end of the year.

On the whole, the project's experience so far has demonstrated the feasibility and a growing demand for the continuation of its services. It is now actively engaged in exploring the possibility of consolidating and expanding its services by establishing an independent regional quality assurance institute.

4.5.2 The Arab States Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

The Arab States Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE) is a regional network established in connection with the Association of Arab Universities (AArU). ANQAHE was launched on 9 June 2007. ANQAHE is an independent non-profit organisation set up in association with the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). Arabic is the official language of the network. English may be also used in any of ANQAHE's operations and communications.

The ANQAHE mission is: "To ensure and strengthen the quality assurance of higher education institutions, to enhance collaboration between similar quality assurance bodies or organisations in the Arab states, and to develop cooperation with other regional and international quality assurance organisations and networks".

The ANQAHE goals are:

- To support and enhance quality assurance organisations in the Arab states
- To develop human resources and establish a cooperation mechanism in the field of quality assurance in higher education in the Arab states
- To initiate and sustain regional and international cooperation in quality assurance in higher education
- To exchange information on quality assurance in higher education between Arab states.

ANQAHE's main objectives are:

- To promote and disseminate good quality assurance practice(s) in higher education in the Arab region
- To establish standards and guidelines to assist in the development of new quality assurance agencies in the region
- To enhance continuous improvement and capacity building for quality assurance agencies in the region
- To facilitate links and communication between quality assurance agencies in the Arab region
- To provide an information platform on quality assurance standards, good practice(s), professional institutions and programmes, and reviewers among member organisations
- To develop an information platform on qualification frameworks, recognised education institutions and accredited programmes in the region
- To assist ANQAHE members in determining the standards of institutions operating across national borders
- To assist in developing and using credit transfer schemes to enhance student mobility between institutions, both within and across national borders
- To provide ANQAHE members with information on the credit points system to facilitate student mobility in the Arab region
- To facilitate research in the field of quality assurance in higher education in the region
- Where appropriate, to represent the region and promote the interests of the region, e.g. vis-à-vis other networks and international organisations
- To provide a service for evaluating quality assurance agencies upon request.

ANQAHE aims to achieve its objectives through a range of methods, including the dissemination of information through the network's website, newsletters, documents, journals and books, whether in paper-based or electronic form. By referring to the databases, good practice and other resources of other regional and international networks, ANQAHE organises seminars, workshops and conferences at both regional and sub-regional level, and for members. It also arranges visits and exchange for reviewers and other experts working in quality assurance of higher education and assists in the mutual recognition of various quality assurance bodies in the Arab region. ANQAHE also carries out other appropriate responsibilities as determined by the General Council or the Board.

ANQAHE has two categories of membership: Full Member and Associate Member. The governing bodies and authorities of ANQAHE are the General Assembly, the Board and the Secretariat.

4.6 Europe: The European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

The European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education was established in 2000 to promote European cooperation in the field of quality assurance. In November 2004, the General Assembly transformed the network into the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). The idea for the association originates from the European Pilot Project for Evaluating Quality in Higher Education (1994-95), which demonstrated the value of sharing and developing experience in the field of quality assurance. Subsequently, the idea was given momentum by Council Recommendation 98/561/EC of 24 September 1998 on European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education and by the Bologna Declaration of 1999.

ENQA consists of three organisational entities: General Assembly, Board and Secretariat. The General Assembly, composed of the representatives of the ENQA member agencies, with representatives of the respective European Ministries and stakeholders attending as observers, is the association's main decision-making body. As the executive body of ENQA, the Board is responsible for the effective management of all current issues. The Secretariat takes care of the day-to-day business, including policy, administration, record-keeping and accounts management.

ENQA initiates and coordinates transnational quality assurance projects that aim to disseminate information at European level and to promote the establishment of the quality assurance framework for the European Higher Education Area.

ENQA is one of the first regional networks in this field. All the networks reflect the cultural, legal and education environment in which they exist, and ENQA is no different to the other networks in this regard. The Association is closely associated with the reform of European Higher Education and the creation of the European Higher Education Area, which has grown from the Bologna Declaration of European Education Ministers issued in 1999. As a consultative member of the Bologna Process and responding to mandates from the European education ministers, ENQA is probably more within the loop – or within the tent – than some of the other networks.

Together with its three main partners, and with the European Commission as an observer member, ENQA forms the so-called E4 Group. The four organisations jointly organise a Quality Assurance Forum on a yearly basis.

At the Bergen meeting of May 2005, the European Ministers of Education adopted the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" drafted by ENQA. The ministers committed themselves to introducing the proposed model for peer review of quality assurance agencies on a national basis. They also welcomed the principle of a European register of quality assurance agencies based on national review and asked for the practicalities of its implementation to be further developed by ENQA in cooperation with EUA, EURASHE and ESIB, with a report back to the ministers to be submitted through the Bologna Follow-Up Group.

5   Facets of Regional Cooperation in Quality Assurance in Higher Education

The organisers chose to discuss a number of topics that were very closely connected to regional cooperation. In the working groups, input statements by key speakers were followed by discussions.

5.1   Benchmarking and Development of Quality Assurance Standards

Many of the regional cooperation initiatives talk about the need to formulate standards acceptable to and applicable in the region. The questions to be answered are:

- Who are the players/stakeholders in the regional initiatives? What kind of role do the various stakeholders play in terms of benchmarking and setting/defining standards?

- Do the networks set their own standards or are the standards set externally?

- How do the different levels (national, regional, international) relate to each other?

- Is a shared understanding of standards a prerequisite for regional cooperation in quality assurance?

Assoc. Prof. Damrong Thawesaengskulthai from the Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok (Thailand) explained how his university was coping with drawing up standards and how these relate to nationally and regionally formulated standards. Taking the Chulalongkorn University as the starting point, Prof. Damrong distinguished three levels for drawing up standards: institutional, national, and ASEAN.

The university had to comply with the standards set nationally, as performed by ONESQA (Office of National Education Standards & Quality Assessment). The Chulalongkorn University has translated these criteria into 4 groups of standards. Based on the evaluation, the university applies an internal outcome-based benchmark. The following distinctions

are made: Level 5 means recognition at national level, Level 6 at ASEAN level, and Level 7 at international level. Internal benchmarking is followed by external benchmarking involving certification or accreditation by an external body.

At regional level, the ASEAN University Network (AUN-QA) has formulated standards and guidelines for the members of the AUN and of other universities in the AUN region. The guidelines are not expressed as directives that have to be followed by the universities. The standards and criteria mentioned in the guidelines are benchmarks to be used by the universities to see how far they are on track towards quality and quality assurance. However, although not compulsory, the AUN-QA does advise that the standards and criteria are implemented. This gives the universities a passport to the developments and harmonisation of higher education in the ASEAN region. The harmonisation of higher education will be promoted by applying these criteria. To strengthen the position of higher education in the ASEAN region, it is important that the higher education system uses a harmonised quality assurance system, based on the standards and criteria of the AUN-QA Guidelines. This applies to internal quality assurance as well to external quality assessment or accreditation.

Ms Birgit Hanny and Mr Christoph Heuman, ASIIN (Accreditation Agency for Study Programs in Engineering, Informatics, Natural Sciences and Mathematics) explained how Europe was looking to draw up European standards in engineering education. Some of the European countries have an accreditation system, while others apply external quality assurance without a formal accreditation decision. Often, the accrediting body or the external assessment agencies talk about international standards. The question, however, is whether international standards actually exist. The European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education (ENAEE) was founded in October 2005 by three important European associations: Feani (Fédération Européenne d'Associations Nationales d'Ingénieurs), Sefi (Société Européenne pour la Formation d'Ingénieurs) and Eurocadres (Conseil des Cadres Européens), plus national accrediting bodies from 11 European countries.

ENAEE's goals are to create confidence in accreditation systems for engineering degree programmes within Europe and to promote the implementation of accreditation for engineering education systems in Europe. The activities undertaken by ENAEE include:

- Facilitating the free exchange of information and providing an effective communication channel for those bodies and individuals concerned with educational and professional standards in engineering throughout the European Higher Education Area

- Providing such information as already exists within each country on topics and issues connected with educational and professional engineering standards
- Participating in the creation and ultimately the administration of a European accreditation framework for engineering education programmes.

ENAEE has defined framework standards for first and second cycle qualifications in engineering. Similar developments can be seen in the European Chemistry Thematic Network Association (ECTNA). ECTNA has developed framework standards for a first / second cycle qualification in chemistry. These were approved in 2003 by the assembly of the European Association of Chemical and Molecular Sciences EuCheMS and in 2004 by the Bologna Process seminar "Chemistry Studies in the European Higher Education Area". A pilot project for the introduction of a Euromaster Label was launched in July 2006. Finally, standards were developed for the outcomes, the curricular structure and content, mobility (credit points, modules, recognition, diploma supplement), and the methods of teaching, learning and assessment.

A third example involves the Euro-Info framework standards that aim to develop accreditation standards (procedures) and a qualification framework (outcomes/competencies) for the accreditation of informatics and computer-science education reflecting established best practice(s). Furthermore Euro-Info will promote student and graduate mobility through the trans-European acceptance of informatics/computer science degrees by implementing competence outcomes and a recognised European quality label. Existing standards (national and international) are being reviewed as a methodological basis for developing and defining new standards.

The discussion on standards and benchmarks clearly shows how difficult it is to define international standards. Often, it is national prejudice that hinders the definition of standards beyond national borders. However, regional standards that are internationally defined and accepted are becoming increasingly important, especially when we look at international developments in certain professions.

The basic conditions for defining regional standards are a sound common understanding and knowledge of the respective national and sub-national approaches, and of the landscape, the stakeholders and the organisations involved, of existing and planned systems and regulations, and of the experience gained. Shared definitions of the basic vocabulary and shared ideas of what quality could mean are essential. The definition must build on the results of existing communities as a starting point for creating subject-related standards. Regional (i.e. supranational) standards would only help in the definition of national standards if national/sub-national players were involved in setting these.

5.2 Sustainable Funding Mechanisms for Regional Quality Assurance

One of the problems of quality assurance is that it is costly and time consuming. Often developing countries have few resources available to them for implementing quality assurance. This means that the following questions are important for regional quality assurance:

- How can a sustainable funding mechanism be installed for regional quality assurance activities (e.g. membership fees)?
- Which phases can be defined when establishing regional quality assurance networks (e.g. seed money for starting networks, sustainable long-term funding mechanisms)? What are the operational costs for keeping a regional network alive?

Dr Amelia Guevara from the University of the Philippines presented the experience of the ASEAN University Network in Quality Assurance. Since 1998 a series of 7 regional workshops have been carried out. One of the outcomes of this process is a manual to implement the AUN-QA guidelines in the region. This AUN-QA project used a cost-sharing scheme involving the participant universities, with each university paying the travel expenses of their representatives and the host university covering local expenses during the workshop. It is a successful example of experienced cooperation between universities and shows that a cost-sharing scheme with universities works well in quality assurance during the stage of learning from each other, developing a common view, drafting manuals and instruments, and even for evaluating quality improvement.

However, when we go to the stage of regional accreditation with various kinds of regionally independent bodies carrying out the evaluation, the question of financing the operation becomes much more difficult and complex, as was confirmed by Dr Orlando Morales, representative of the Ministries of Education in the Central American Council of Accreditation (CCA). He explained that the regional agreement under which the CCA was established states that the financing of the Council would be the responsibility of the Ministries of Education, public and private universities and the professional associations of the region. However, as experience has shown, only some of the CCA founders have been paying their contribution to the Council. Many

others have not fulfilled their commitment to the Council, yet. It shows that these regional schemes, with independent, multiple accreditation systems, might be very fragile as regional public goods in terms of financing.

Ms Kea Wollrad, representative of the Inter-American Development Bank, presented a regional public goods programme established by the Bank in 2004 for promoting regional solutions to regional problems. It might serve to enhance quality across borders through regional cooperation in higher education. There is an annual call for proposals, countries can present proposals in any sector that they consider important for cross-border cooperation. Through this programme the Bank might fund regional decision-making meetings and workshops, regional products, such as the design of policy tools and standards, regional training (on a pilot basis), regional coordination to ensure progress in regional decision-making, etc. One of the examples presented was a regional engineering accreditation system project for the Great Caribbean, including the participation of the Dominican Republic, Jamaica and Panama.

One of the group members also commented that funding has not been a problem in the regional European experience. Rather, it has been peer pressure between countries that has driven the regional efforts, with no country wanting to be left behind its neighbours, even though countries do not like being told what to do by any regional authority, such as the European Commission. The use of scorecards that show the progress made by the countries in fulfilling their regional commitments has been more successful.

5.3 Regional Quality Assurance – Increasing University Autonomy?

When talking about the development of regional quality assurance, one of the interesting issues is whether regional quality assurance enhances university autonomy. Important questions are:

- How is the balance of power changing between the various players in higher education (regional bodies, national ministries, higher education institutions) today?

- Are national bodies really losing and regional bodies gaining influence?

- How does regional quality assurance in higher education influence university autonomy?

- Does regional quality assurance have an impact on the changing balance of power? What are the roles of the various stakeholders (university leaders, students, national ministries, regional bodies, quality assurance agencies)?

Dr Karin Riegler, Senior Programme Manager of the European Universities Association, focused on the role that the European University Association plays for the quality assurance agencies. Dr Riegler presented the EUA vision on quality, which she sees as having a great variety of possible approaches and definitions (fitness for purpose, compliance, excellence, enhancement, control, etc.) and various perspectives (input, output, processes). There is no shared definition of quality among universities and their differing missions. It is a relative concept, based primarily on the institutional mission and the goals. Quality is not a neutral concept, but is closely related to questions of ideology and power.

When talking about autonomy, we mean "living by our own laws", i.e. self-governance. There is a contract between the university and the state (but the relevance of other factors and players besides the state must also be considered). But what exactly is autonomy? One example is the academic, financial, organisational and staffing autonomy contained in the EUA Lisbon Declaration of 2007. Actually, it is the ability of the higher education institutions to make decisions and to manage their affairs in the best interests of students and society. Quality and autonomy are key issues in the Berlin Communiqué of 2003 published within the scope of the Bologna Process. It states that there is an explicit link between institutional responsibility for quality and the institutions' independence. There is a power shift towards the universities and away from the quality assurance agencies and governments (or at least, there should be such a shift). There are indications that as the Bologna reforms have progressed, institutional autonomy has increased. In 2003, 50% of the higher education institutions viewed their independence as satisfactory versus 75% of higher education institutions in 2007. There are also some indications that universities are making use of their increased institutional autonomy for quality development. The implication for the university is stakeholder involvement (students, staff, external experts) and accountability (internal and external).

Mr Colin Tück from the Bologna Process Committee of the European Students' Union (ESU) explained quality assurance at European level. The principles are that there is and will be national and institutional diversity. There will be a European framework rather than detailed regulations. The European Standards & Guidelines for quality assurance as jointly developed by the "E4 Group" (institutions, students, quality assurance agencies) are important. These guidelines cover internal and external quality assurance and aim to facilitate the development of national quality assurance systems,

to ensure the comparability and compatibility of quality assurance and to create mutual trust in quality assurance systems. Furthermore, the E4 (EUA, EURASHE, ENQA, ESU) have developed the European Quality Assurance Register (EQR). This was endorsed by the ministers meeting in London in May 2007. The purpose is to list agencies complying with European standards and guidelines, to create a basis for mutual trust and to enhance recognition and mobility.

After quality assurance agencies have been established under national laws, it can often be observed that the autonomy of and powers for managing the universities shift from the accreditation agencies and governments to the institutions. Hence, quality assurance mechanisms are transferring more powers to the universities than before. Why? Because this promotes a quality culture and includes the responsibility to maintain and improve quality. Universities are more accountable to the public for their outcomes, use of resources and are becoming more responsive to society's needs. They are also showing compliance with the set standards and are acting creatively and competitively. Through their autonomy universities are increasingly involving the stakeholders. Higher education therefore learns what their expectations are, and so they plan together. Furthermore, universities satisfy stakeholders through demonstrated quality. Student involvement is important in designing the curriculum and determining the quality of outcomes.

In most cases, national external quality assessment or accreditation bodies are supported by laws, and accreditation is compulsory. The legal framework is necessary for establishing the legal status and for regulating the accountability of individual universities. It seems that comparability, benchmarking, employability and international mobility are assured to a greater extent through regional bodies. Regional quality assurance initiatives are enhancing university autonomy and limiting government powers in the management of universities (control of political, ideological influences). Hence, there is a shift in power from government to university, with the latter becoming more responsible and accountable for maintaining and improving the quality of education.

5.4 Developing Equivalent Quality Assurance Mechanisms – The Role of Quality Assurance Manuals and Human Resource Development

When talking about quality enhancement in a regional setting, a number of specific questions need to be addressed on the development of equivalent quality assurance mechanisms:

- How can a common understanding of quality assurance be promoted at the universities in the region (e.g. manuals, training)?
- What can be done in the network? What is the framework for regional cooperation?
- How can human resource development be made sustainable (sequential approach, focus on processes)?
- How can regional cooperation in quality assurance be organised? What needs to come first and how can cooperation be made sustainable?

Ms Michaela Martin, Programme Specialist at the International Institute for Education Planning (IIEP), UNESCO, explained the training-on-line approach. The course provides participants with concepts, issues and tools for developing and sustaining their external quality assurance (EQA) systems. It informs participants about the implications of the various options and stimulates reflection on their adaptation to different institutional contexts. The participants get a range of examples of international experience concerning the options in EQA and can draw lessons on "good or desirable" practice(s) in EQA systems, so that teaching, learning and research practices can be improved.

Dr Gilberto Alfaro Varela, Former Coordinator of the CSUCA Regional Expert Team on Quality Assurance and School of Chemistry, National University of Costa Rica, shared his experience and lessons learned from developments in Central America. The following activities were organised to promote a common understanding of quality assurance:

- Conferences on general quality assurance topics
- National and regional workshops

- Long-term courses
- Instalment of regional technical committees to promote quality assurance processes
- Development of guidelines for evaluation, accreditation and management processes.

One of the conditions for regional cooperation is that participants must be able to recognise the academic capabilities of others and so learn from each other's experience(s) and open up towards sharing and collaboration. The participants must commit themselves to quality assurance processes in the region and must promote team work as a basis for creating new quality assurance knowledge. Furthermore, it is important that regional organisations are established. National collaboration and support from universities is needed. Commitment of the authorities from different entities and of the key players and, of course, the trust of all the stakeholders are essential.

Dr Tan Kay Chuan from the National University of Singapore presented an institutional approach from his university. He pointed out the critical success factors of a quality assurance system:

- Balancing accountability with improvement
- Incentivising institutions and staff
- University ownership of the processes and outcomes
- Enhancing the professionalism and competitiveness of institutions.

5.5   Joint Quality Assurance Procedures and Mutual Recognition

When looking at regional developments in quality assurance it is necessary to apply joint quality assurance procedures. Often, the regional quality assurance will be based on national quality assurance activities. This aims to facilitate the mutual recognition of national accreditation decisions. The key questions in this respect are:

- What are the conditions for mutual recognition? Under what conditions can another country's accreditation decision be recognised?
- How can regional standards be implemented nationally?
- How do regional and national regulations relate to each other?

- How can reliable bodies be recognised?
- What are the requirements for reliable agencies (e.g. equivalent quality assurance procedures as a prerequisite for recognising other accreditation bodies)? Who are the stakeholders?
- How can mutual recognition be technically implemented (e.g. European register, certification of agencies, joint procedures, common standards, etc.)?

Dr Guy Aelterman, board member of ENQA and a member of the NVAO (the Netherlands), presented his ideas on mutual recognition. Joint quality assurance procedures and mutual recognition are influenced and determined by the object of recognition, the rationale of recognition, and the tools and methods available for recognising it. But what is the object of recognition? Is it the programme? The degree? The evaluation or accreditation decision? Does it involve single, dual, multiple or joint programmes or degrees? The rationale of recognition can be academic, professional or a combination of both. The tools and methods available are mutual recognition as defined by the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA), including recognition of an international accreditation by a national agency (equivalency of accreditation). Joint and dual accreditations (or evaluations) are also an option.

According to the ECA definition, the mutual recognition of accreditation or evaluation decisions means: "If I, as agency A, were to implement the accreditation that agency B has implemented, I would achieve the same result." Mutual recognition of accreditation decisions is a step-by-step process. The mutual standards and procedures have to be analysed before the results of assessments and the decisions based on these assessments can be recognised. An accreditation can be mutually recognised if there is mutual trust and if a certain degree of diversity in criteria and procedures and the mutual verification of data and results are accepted.

Dr Isam Naqib, Regional Project Manager, UNDP, spoke about the foundation of a regional institute for quality assurance in the Arab region. There is a regional drive towards establishing standards of quality and recognition (perceived goals and developments). There are a lot of challenges to be faced. Future plans include introducing evaluation methodologies, building university quality assurance systems and developing regional and international partnerships.

Mr Ernesto Villanueva, Past-President, RIACES, talked about the phases for defining the quality assurance mechanisms and the practices involved in evaluation and accreditation. He explained that it is important to set up agencies and networks. There is a need to harmonise and converge the evaluation criteria and the requirements and training for peers and reviewers. The conditions for mutual recognition are:

- Programme quality accreditation and recognition
- The agencies' actual coverage
- The frequency of evaluation and accreditation rounds
- Transparency of the peer / reviewer records held in the register of experts
- The relationship between quality assurance and the diffusion of recognised programmes.

Many participants asked for the history of the establishment, structure, number of members, membership and past/present main activities of the three above quality assurance networks to be explained. There are many quality assurance organisations in the world: international, regional, national, inter-institutional, independent. But the role of INQAAHE with its regular, frequent and effective activities is seen as important for many networks.

The group discussed the relationship between quality assurance networks, education ministries, quality assurance agencies and universities. The conclusion was that they help and support each other by supplying information about institutions, programmes, their accreditation status, recognition, etc.

5.6 Enhancing Regional Employability through Quality Assurance

Enhancing employability through quality assurance is one of the main reasons for organising quality assurance. The key questions in this respect are:

- As labour markets become increasingly regional (and international), how does this change the needs of employers and employees?
- How should universities best prepare for regional (and international) labour markets?
- Why do we need regional quality assurance in higher education? How can regional quality assurance in higher education support the regionalisation of labour markets and the regional mobility of graduates?

- What are the chances and opportunities? What are the obstacles and dangers?

Dr Andreas Keller, Member of the Standing Committee on Higher Education and Research Pan-European Network, Education International, states that an important aspect of quality assurance for university degrees and degree programmes is that they should improve the professional qualifications of higher education graduates. The acquisition of professional skills is a major criterion in assessing the quality of a course. The trade unions call for each course to demonstrate that it actually qualifies people to practise their profession. If the professional community believes in the quality of university degrees and academic diplomas held by foreign applicants, these will benefit from the same opportunities as domestic applicants. Hence, quality assurance contributes to boosting the international mobility of students and academics.

How any particular course actually imparts professional skills, and hence its quality, cannot be decreed top down – neither by the education bureaucracy nor solely by the academic representatives of higher education disciplines. Rather, academic reform and quality assurance need to be organised as participatory processes in which students and representatives of professional practice also take part. Professional practice needs to be represented on both sides: by the employers and by the trade unions representing those who work in the sector. The first decisive factor is that a professional qualification cannot be reduced down to the simple formula that training must above all impart skills of immediate relevance to the profession. In this respect, the widely used term of "employability" is too narrow. But nor would the higher education institutions be doing their job properly if they sought to convey a canon of knowledge with no particular purpose, in total isolation from professional requirements. A degree that enables students to exercise a profession is one that, firstly, relates to professional practice and, secondly, provides students with the scientifically founded skills they need to be able to reflect critically on professional practice.

Dr Frank Stefan Becker, Corporate Responsibility Corporate Citizenship, Siemens AG and Spokesman of the Working Group on Engineering Education of the German Electrical and Electronic Manufacturers Association (ZVEI) spoke from the perspective of a multinational company with 475,000 employees working in 190 countries, of whom 36% hold an undergraduate degree. Siemens needs international teams and has partnerships with 600 universities

worldwide. He emphasised the importance of internships and international placements when designing programmes. He gave his vision of quality assurance in an international labour market. Recruiting is initially local: in the country, for the country. But later it will involve international teams, delegation to a different country or just cooperation in virtual teams requiring an "international spirit". New curricula should be developed in close cooperation with industry or professional associations, duly taking into account the requirements of the labour markets. A system of continual monitoring of the teaching success should be established using student and alumni feedback. Programmes should be accredited; accreditation organisations should cooperate closely to agree on standards and procedures. Universities should use the Bologna Process to reform curricula (credit points, output-orientation) and to provide employers with a meaningful diploma supplement. He also had some advice for the universities. They should

- collect and analyse surveys containing the views of managers and recruiters as carefully as they would the scientific papers produced by colleagues.

- define the set of skills and knowledge that students should possess according to these requirements.

- use every opportunity to acquaint students with the work environment, establish contacts with companies (internships, Bachelor's / Master's thesis).

- facilitate international exchange by establishing cooperative agreements with other universities to harmonise curricula and procedures.

- invite external experts to give presentations on business or social topics relevant to the students.

- teach students by giving them projects with specific goals.

Dr Benjamin Jacobs, President, Central American Federation of Professional Colleges and Associations, highlighted the experience of Central America, where it is the best graduates who get the jobs. He tried to answer the question as to how universities could best prepare for regional (and international) labour markets. In this respect, there are two steps. On the one hand, there is internal evaluation of the universities and postgraduate programmes through the auto-evaluation system. On the other hand, there is the certification system implemented through special agencies like CCA, ACAP (accreditation agencies for postgraduate programmes) that can be national, regional or international.

The universities need to prepare their professors and teachers well, by giving them economic incentives when they produce a new kind of degree; they also need time to investigate and publish their studies, for workshops, seminars

and all types of meetings that can help them increase their knowledge and skills. The universities have to bring in visiting professors, mainly in new fields of knowledge or deficient areas.

What kind of role can regional quality assurance play in higher education to provide reliable information on the quality and relevance of degree programmes? Quality assurance in higher education is a necessary method for evaluating, correcting and proposing changes that help students reach their aims. Nowadays we can talk about regional labour markets as being very competitive, which is why qualified programmes achieve the best results with their graduates.

How can regional quality assurance in higher education support the regionalisation of labour markets and the regional mobility of graduates? While quality assurance in higher education sets the standards, the programmes that teach them earn a quality certification, enabling graduates from these institutions to gain regional acceptance, and making cross-border mobility easier, because the programmes fulfil the requirements.

Who should be involved in regional quality assurance to assure that the information provided is reliable (e.g. for employers or professional associations)? All the institutions that by law have the right to certify qualifications for professional practice should be involved. In the case of Guatemala, these are the national university and professional colleges; in El Salvador, it is done through the Ministry of Education. At the regional level, CEPUCA (in Central America) is responsible.

What are the obstacles and dangers? The more important obstacles and dangers are firstly, financial (the cost is high, with respect to maintaining, administrating and starting up the process); secondly, time, if the lapse before starting work is too long, interest in the topic is lost. Thirdly, a lack of awareness and insufficient information from the institutions interested in obtaining the certification, and possibly from the agencies, if they do not cover all countries.

Sunday, 17 June 2007

19:00 h Welcome dinner for early arrivals

Monday, 18 June 2007

from 11:00 h Registration and snacks

12:00 h **Welcome by the Organising Institutions**

Dr Christiane Gaehtgens, Secretary-General,
German Rectors' Conference (HRK)

Dr Christian Bode, Secretary-General,
German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)

12:30 h **Keynote Presentation**

Overview on Global Developments in Quality Assurance with
a Focus on Regional Cooperation Initiatives

Mr Peter P T Cheung, Board Member of the International
Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
(INQAAHE) and President, Asia-Pacific Quality Network
(APQN)

13:15 h **Comment**

Dr Richard Hopper, Tertiary Education Specialist,
World Bank, Washington

13:45 h **Comment**

Professor Dr Matthias Weiter, Head, Section "Regional
Development Policy; Middle East", Federal Ministry for
Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)

14:00 h Coffee break and snacks

14:30 h **Working Group Discussion
on Regional Cooperation Initiatives**

Working Group A: The Central American Quality
Assurance System (CSUCA, CCA, ACAAI, ACAP)

Input: Mr Francisco Alarcón, Deputy Secretary-General,
Central American Superior Council for Higher Education
(CSUCA)

Chair: Ms Iris Danowski, Head of Section Western Europe and South America, HRK

Working Group B: The Standing Committee on Quality Assurance of the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA)

Input: Professor Mayunga Nkunya, Coordinator, Regional Standing Committee on Quality Assurance, The Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA)

Chair: Mr Christoph Hansert, Head, Higher Education Management and International Consultancy Projects, DAAD

Working Group C: The Working Group on Quality Assurance of the ASEAN University Network (AUN)

Input: Professor Dr Nantana Gajaseni, Deputy Executive Director, The ASEAN University Network (AUN)

Chair: Ms Marijke Wahlers, Head of Section Asia, Australia, Oceania, HRK

Working Group D: Regional Projects in the Arab Region

Input: Dr Isam Naqib, Regional Project Manager, UNDP Higher Education Project for the Arab Region, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

Professor Dr Nadia Badrawi, Member of the Pan-Arab Commission for the Establishment of Regional QAA, Association of Arab Universities (AARU) and Member of the Board, INQAAHE

Chair: Dr Hanns Sylvester, Head, Development Co-operation Department, DAAD

Working Group E: The European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

Input: Mr Séamus Puirséil, Vice-President, The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

Chair: Mr Stefan Bienefeld, Head, Project Quality Management, HRK

15:45 h   Coffee break

16:15 h   **Panel Discussion on Regional Cooperation Initiatives in Quality Assurance**

Chairs: Dr Angelika Schade, Senior Expert, Germany

Mr Christoph Hansert, Head, Higher Education Management and International Consultancy Projects, DAAD

Panelists:
Mr Francisco Alarcón, CSUCA
Professor Mayunga Nkunya, IUCEA
Professor Dr Nantana Gajaseni, AUN
Professor Dr Nadia Badrawi, AARU
Dr Isam Naqib, UNDP
Mr Séamus Puirséil, ENQA

17:30 h End of first conference day

19:00 h Evening reception at Collegium Leoninum

Tuesday, 19 June 2007

9:00 h Welcome by the Organising Institutions
Wrap-up of Previous Day

Mr Ton Vroeijenstijn, Senior Expert, The Netherlands

9:30 h **Working Groups**

Working Group 1: Benchmarking and Development of QA Standards

Input Statements: Professor Dr Damrong Thawesaengskulthai Member of AUN-QA, ASEAN University Network and Chief Quality Officer, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand

Ms Birgit Hanny & Mr Christoph Heumann Project Coordinators, EUR-ACE Project and Euro-Inf Project

Dr Yousif Al-Bastaki, Bahrain Country Project Manager, UNDP Higher Education Project for the Arab Region

Chair: Mr Stefan Bienefeld, Head, Project Quality Management, HRK

Rapporteur: Mr Mark Frederiks, Policy Advisor, European Consortium for Accreditation

Working Group 2: Sustainable Funding Mechanisms for Regional QA – Obstacles and Options

Input Statements: Dr Orlando Morales, Member of the Central American Accreditation Council (CCA) and Representative, Educational and Cultural Coordination of Central America (CECC)

Ms Kea Wollrad, Operations Specialist, Regional Technical Cooperation Division, Inter-American Development Bank

Professor Dr Amelia P Guevara, Member of AUN-QA, ASEAN University Network and Vice-President for Academic Affairs, University of the Philippines Diliman

Chair: Mr Christoph Hansert, Head, Higher Education Management and International Consultancy Projects, DAAD

Rapporteur: Mr Francisco Alarcón, Deputy Secretary-General, Central American Superior Council for Higher Education (CSUCA)

Working Group 3: Regional QA – Increasing Autonomy for the Universities?

Input Statements: Dr Karin Riegler, Senior Programme Manager, European University Association (EUA)

Mr Colin Tück, Bologna Process Committee, European Students' Union (ESU)

Professor James Tuiotek, Member of the Standing Committee on Quality Assurance, IUCEA and Vice-Chancellor, Egerton University, Kenya

Chair: Dr Michael Harms, Head, International Department, HRK

Rapporteur: Rev Dr Charles Kitima, Member of the Standing Committee on Quality Assurance, IUCEA and Vice-Chancellor, St. Augustine University of Tanzania

11:00 h   Coffee break

11:30 h   **Working Groups**

Working Group 4: Developing Equivalent QA Mechanisms – The Role of QA Manuals and Human Resource Development

Input Statements: Ms Michaela Martin, Programme Specialist, International Institute for Education Planning (IIEP), UNESCO

Dr Gilberto Alfaro Varela, Former Coordinator of the CSUCA Regional Expert Team on QA and School of Chemistry, National University of Costa Rica

Dr Tan Kay Chuan, Member of AUN-QA, ASEAN University Network and Acting Director, Office of Quality Management, National University of Singapore

Chair: Ms Marijke Wahlers, Head of Section Asia, Australia, Oceania, HRK

Rapporteur: Dr Halima Wakabi Akbar, Member of the Standing Committee on Quality Assurance, IUCEA and Dean, Faculty of Education, Islamic University in Uganda

Working Group 5: Joint QA Procedures and Mutual Recognition

Input Statements: Dr Guy Aelterman, Member of the Board, The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and Member of the Board, Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands & Flanders (NVAO)

Dr Isam Naqib, Regional Project Manager, UNDP Higher Education Project for the Arab Region, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

Mr Ernesto Villanueva, Past-President, Ibero-American Network of Quality in Higher Education (RIACES)

Chair: Ms Iris Danowski, Head of Section Western Europe and South America, HRK

Rapporteur: Professor Dr Nguyen Hoi Nghia, Member of AUN-QA, ASEAN University Network and Director, Centre for Educational Testing and Academic Quality Evaluation, Vietnam National University

Working Group 6: Enhancing Regional Employability through Quality Assurance

Input Statements: Dr Frank Stefan Becker, Corporate Responsibility Corporate Citizenship, Siemens AG and Spokesman of the Working Group on Engineering Education of the German Electrical and Electronic Manufacturers' Association (ZVEI)

Dr Andreas Keller, Member of the Standing Committee on Higher Education and Research, Pan-European Network, Education International

Dr Benjamin Jacobs, President, Central American Federation of Professional Colleges and Associations

Chair: Mr Christoph Hansert, Head, Higher Education Management and International Consultancy Projects, DAAD

Rapporteur: Dr Etilvia Arjona, Member of the Central American Accreditation Council (CCA)

13:00 h	Lunch break
14:30 h	**Presentation and Discussion of Working Group Results**
	Chair: Dr Michael Harms, Head, International Department, HRK
15:45 h	Coffee break
16:15 h	**Panel Discussion on Political and Societal Implications of Regional Quality Assurance**
	Chair: Professor Dr Volker Nienhaus, President, University of Marburg
	Panelists: Dr Telémaco Talavera, President, Central American Superior Council for Higher Education (CSUCA)
	Professor Chacha Nyaigotti-Chacha, Executive Secretary, Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA)
	Professor Supachai Yavaprabhas, Executive Director, Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development (RIHED)
	Professor Mohamed Najib Abdul Wahed, Deputy Minister for Scientific Research and Academic Affairs, Ministry of Higher Education, Syria
17:45 h	End of second conference day
19:30 h	Trip on the River Rhine including dinner

Wednesday, 20 June 2007

9:00 h	Welcome by the organising institutions
9:15 h	Regional Working Groups on Future Perspectives
	Working Group F: Latin America
	Chair/Rapporteur: Ms María José Lemaitre, President, Ibero-American Network of Quality in Higher Education (RIACES)
	Working Group G: East Africa
	Chair/Rapporteur: Professor Chacha Nyaigotti-Chacha, Executive Secretary, Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA)

Working Group H: Southeast Asia

Chair/Rapporteur: Professor Dr Piniti Ratananukul, Executive Director, ASEAN University Network

Working Group I: Arab Region

Chair/Rapporteur: Professor Dr Salwa Bayoumi El-Magoli, Chair, National Quality Assurance and Accreditation Committee, Egypt

Working Group K: Europe

Chair/Rapporteur: Dr Eric Lindesjöö, Member of the Nordic Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education (NOQA) and Project Manager, Swedish National Agency for Higher Education

10:30 h   Coffee break

11:00 h   **Drafting of Bonn Declaration on Regional Cooperation in Quality Assurance**

Chairs: Mr Ton Vroeijenstijn, Senior Expert, The Netherlands

Mr Stefan Bienefeld, Head, Project Quality Management, HRK

12:00 h   **Wrap-up and Closing Words**

Professor Dr Johann W. Gerlach, Member of the Board, DAAD

Dr Michael Harms, Head, International Department, HRK

12:30 h   End of conference and lunch buffet