

“Enhancing Quality Across Borders - Regional Cooperation in Quality Assurance in Higher Education”

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Welcome Address

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Distinguished Guests,

Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great privilege and pleasure to welcome you on behalf of the German Rectors' Conference to our conference “Enhancing Quality Across Borders - Regional Cooperation in Quality Assurance in Higher Education”. Thank you for joining us here today to exchange views and share experience in this important field.

1. Achieving and maintaining **quality** is not a new phenomenon, but has always been at the core of higher education, in teaching as well as research. The underlying assumption is, of course, that **excellence** – one of the topical issues in German higher education at the moment – can only be reached from a very high level of quality.
2. Thus, universities have to make the concept of “quality” part of their **management philosophy**, and they have to make their quality **transparent** and **visible** – both internally and to the outside world. The introduction of internal as well as external quality assurance systems, i.e. evaluation and accreditation based on peer review, are important milestones on the way to more transparent quality in teaching and research and to more **autonomous** and **accountable** universities.

Only strong, autonomous and accountable universities can remain competitive and can respond effectively to the challenges of institutional diversification, economic globalisation and the overarching needs of societies.

3. Also in the **European context**, the issue of quality assurance is of central importance. Quality assurance has been one of the major action lines of the Bologna Process of creating a European Higher Education Area from the very beginning. In 2003, European ministers of higher education reconfirmed that quality assurance was at the heart of the European Higher Education Area. Although quality assurance and enhancement were primarily seen as national responsibilities, the need to develop **mutually shared criteria and methodologies** on quality assurance was clearly articulated.
4. The importance of regional cooperation in quality assurance was further highlighted by the adoption of the **Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area**, as proposed by ENQA at the Bergen Summit of Ministers in 2005. Regional cooperation in quality assurance was seen as essential for the development of joint quality standards and the mutual recognition of quality assurance decisions and degrees. Clearly, only enhanced regional cooperation in quality assurance can pave the way for trouble-free **mobility** of **students** and **scientific staff** in regional higher education areas as well as the unhindered mobility of **graduates** in regional job markets.
5. Last month, at their **London meeting**, 46 European higher education ministers once again highlighted that the main responsibility for quality lies with the higher education institutions themselves. The ministers encouraged European governments and universities to further develop their systems of quality assurance and to continue and expand international cooperation in quality assurance.
6. The set-up of a **Register of European Higher Education Quality Assurance Agencies** will be in the focus of attention until the next ministerial meeting in 2009. The register will allow all stakeholders to access objective information about the reliability of national, regional and international quality assurance agencies

within the EHEA. It will be voluntary, self-financing, independent and transparent. Applications for inclusion on the register shall most likely be evaluated on the basis of substantial compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area adopted in Bergen in 2005. The evaluation will be carried out as an independent review process endorsed by national authorities. The German Rectors' Conference has supported the idea of a register right from the start as we feel that the establishment will deepen **mutual trust** and **confidence** and therefore enhance cooperation in quality assurance within the European Higher Education Area. We believe that the register will lead to further progress in the area of mutual recognition of quality assurance and accreditation decisions.

7. The German Rectors' Conference, in all its activities, attaches great value to a dialogue on higher education policy issues at an international level. It is very encouraging to see **initiatives** for **regional cooperation** in higher education quality assurance developing in many other world regions. A lot of progress has been made in the advancement of national quality assurance systems since our first workshop on regional networks in higher education, which was jointly held by the German Rectors' Conference and the German Accreditation Council in **Cologne** in 2003. Since that time, we have been cooperating extensively with our partners in **Central America**. In the framework of this cooperation, we have focussed particularly on the establishment of a Central American Accreditation Council. At the same time, we have intensified our collaboration with the **ASEAN University Network (AUN)**. Today's conference offers a welcome opportunity to resume the exchange and discussion between our world regions, bringing together HRK's and DAAD's long-standing partners. We are thankful for this excellent **opportunity** to get first-hand information about the **current developments** in Central America, East Africa, Southeast Asia, the Arab region and, at the same time, set our European developments into an international context.

The organisation of our workshop is a combined effort by HRK's Quality Management Project and the International Department of HRK, in collaboration with the German Academic Exchange Service. I would like to thank our partners and co-hosts at **DAAD** for the good cooperation in preparing and arranging this conference.

Furthermore, I would like to thank the Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (**BMZ**) sincerely for supporting this conference generously.

Let me wish you a most productive and pleasant three days of discussion and exchange, which will hopefully stimulate new impulses for the future development of quality assurance systems in Central America, East Africa, Southeast Asia, the Arab region and Europe.

Once again, welcome to Germany, welcome to Bonn! Thank you.