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1st European Quality Forum: 'Embedding quality culture in higher education', 23 – 25 November 2006

The first European Quality Forum brought together over 350 participants to the Technische Universität München. They included university leaders, those responsible for quality in institutions, quality assurance agencies and researchers working in this field.

Professor Henrik Toft Jensen (Chair of the Forum organising committee) emphasised that the event was "conceived in the philosophy of the Bologna process", which includes students, higher education institutions and governments and "has greatly contributed to its success."

The Forum highlighted the active engagement of higher education institutions in developing internal quality processes and the important role that they have to play. The unusually high level of demand to attend the Forum and the great number of papers submitted clearly demonstrated the need for such an event. The papers, identified via a call earlier this year, formed the basis for discussions which aimed at starting a dialogue on quality issues in order to build a shared understanding of ways to further develop a European dimension for quality.

The need to include all actors involved in developing quality processes was stressed by plenary speaker Jethro Newton (University of Chester, UK) who stated that the success of any quality system depends on how those involved use it. Therefore, developments should "build upon the varied and common views of quality" held by the different actors concerned. Currently however, according to

Bjorn Stensaker (NIFU STEP, NO), quality assurance systems are being "threatened by other approaches, such as ranking", which fail to take into account the different missions and profiles of institutions and will promote public relation strategies rather than raising quality improvement levels.

The Forum, which will now be an annual event, aims to provide a space where a dialogue between different stakeholders can develop and serve as a bridge between their different view points and needs.

Next Steps

A publication is planned for early 2007, based on some of the papers presented at the Forum as well as more extensive articles.

The 2007 Forum, to take place in November 2007, will explore more broadly the European standards and guidelines for Quality Assurance adopted at the Ministerial meeting of the Bologna process held in Bergen (May 2005). Its main focus will be on how to understand and interpret the standards and guidelines in view of the diversity of higher education and external quality processes in Europe.

The European University Association, as the representative organisation of both the European universities and the national rectors' conferences, is the main voice of the higher education community in Europe. EUA's mission is to promote the development of a coherent system of European higher education and research.

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Background

The event was hosted by the Technische Universität München, funded by the Socrates Programme and co-organised by the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the European University Association (EUA) and the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB).

The first initiative of its kind in Europe, the idea of organising a Forum grew from the realisation that discussions on quality issues are predominately confined to national contexts. The four partner organisations proposed to bring together the higher education and quality assurance community to examine how quality processes should evolve and adapt to emerging higher education trends.

- [Presentations and background documents](#)

For more information on the four organisers:

- European University Association (EUA) www.EUA.be
- European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) www.enqa.eu/
- National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB) www.esib.org/
- European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) www.eurashe.be/