

It is a great joy and pleasure to be here in Santander to speak to you on this important subject and I thank our hosts for the kind invitation.

My pleasure at being invited to speak today is mixed not for the first time, with an embarrassment at being “linguistically challenged” and having to address you in English.

In Ireland, we recently celebrated the centenary of Bloomsday, the fictional day on 16 June 1904 when Leopold Bloom traversed Dublin as recounted in James Joyce’s novel “Ulysses”. It was a wonderful experience to celebrate the centenary of events that never happened!

I intend, however, to draw initial inspiration from another Irish writer, George Bernard Shaw who was born in Dublin in 1856. If he were alive today, he would have celebrated his 148<sup>th</sup> Birthday yesterday! Shaw was and remains famous for his witty aphorisms. He had a great interest in establishing a common world language and he gave a lot of his time and money to promoting Esperanto. He would have been surprised at the developments of recent years where the English language has become, in large measure a *lingua franca* for conferences such as this. The use of “a commonly used European language” (to use the Diploma Supplement euphemism for English) has enabled us to conduct our business in the Bologna Process without overuse of translation services. Yet I am frequently reminded of Shaw’s description of America and England as two countries “divided by a common language”.

The most recent of this series of Bologna Seminars held in Edinburgh at the beginning of July made significant progress in promoting the use of learning

outcomes as the basis for a European Qualifications Framework. This will involve the description of qualifications by the knowledge, skill and competence attained by the students rather than by entry standards, curriculum and duration. And yet when I read Bill Bryson's "Mother Tongue" recently, I was reminded that there are facilities which we lack in English which exist in other languages. "Both French and German can distinguish between knowledge that results from recognition (respectively *connaître* and *kennen*) and knowledge that results from understanding (*savoir* and *wissen*).

I welcome the publication of a number of short glossaries and in particular, the longer compendium of definitions published by UNESCO-CEPES. I know that an INQAAHE Working Group headed by Dorte Kristoffersen has arranged for a common glossary of Quality Assurance terms to be compiled. (Professor Lee Harvey has undertaken to have this work compiled). I look forward to the completion of this project because I believe we will find it difficult to agree on common methodological instruments if we cannot agree on the meaning of the terms we use.

When we all agree on the terms we are using, my next concern is that we may become part of a Bologna Industry engaged in a long *peregrination* through the great cities of Europe from Santander to Bucharest to Strasbourg, Noordwijck, Hamburg and Heerfen, or through Solvenia, Warsaw, Utrecht, St. Petersburg, Amsterdam and Riga. We take a short Christmas break and resume in Copenhagen, Salzburg, Bonn, Warsaw and on to Bergen.

I don't wish to take in any way from the significance and considerable usefulness of the meetings and seminars involved in the Bologna process but we might refocus on a number of fundamental objectives of the project.

The second paragraph of the Bologna Declaration states that

“A European knowledge is now widely recognised as an irreplaceable factor for social and human growth and as an indispensable component to consolidate and enrich European Citizenship, capable of giving its citizens the necessary competencies to face the challenges of the new millennium, together with an awareness of shared values and belonging to a common social and cultural space.”

This seems to me to contrast with a more often quoted Lisbon Objective of Europe as “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion”.

The contrast between the two objectives, one based on “awareness of shared values and belonging to a common social and cultural space” and the other aimed at “the most competitive dynamic knowledge based economy” present us with particular challenges if we are to “develop mutually shared criteria and methodologies on quality assurance”.

As I thought about the subject of this seminar, I tried to distinguish between the different action lines of the Berlin Communiqué or perhaps we should call it the Bergen Agenda:

Quality Assurance

European and National Frameworks of Qualifications

Credits

Recognition

Mobility

Lifelong Learning

Attraction of the European Higher Education Area.

I have to admit I failed. I believe they are inter-related and that the establishment of a European Framework of Qualifications is the foundation stone of the project. If we can achieve these, we provide the means of establishing common methodological instruments for assessment and accreditation. To achieve this a close reading of the Berlin text is necessary:

“Ministers encourage Member States to elaborate a framework of comparable and compatible qualifications for their higher education systems which should seek to describe qualifications in terms of

- workload,
- level,
- learning outcomes,
- competences and
- profile.”

“Ministers also undertake to elaborate an overall framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education area”.

This represents two tasks not one.

Each Minister and each system is challenged to develop a National Qualifications Framework.

The Ministers collectively undertake to present a European Framework.

My belief is that the European Framework should represent an outline framework covering the main Bologna cycles. They should elaborate a framework and not produce an elaborate framework.

The national framework based on the needs of each country will be more detailed and probably much more detailed. They will require detailed working out of workload, level, learning outcomes and profile. The European Framework would provide a link, a clearing house, a bureau de change where the qualifications of individual countries could “meet” and thus facilitate recognition and mobility.

While there will be significant differences between the qualifications and frameworks of individual countries (how could it be otherwise in the early stages of the project where there are 40 countries involved?) the use of common templates and language can facilitate convergence and understanding.

If we can achieve National and European Frameworks, then our “common instruments” become easier to achieve.

1 In the Berlin communiqué of 19 September 2003, Ministers called upon ENQA, in co-operation with the EUA, EURASHE, and ESIB, to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance. ENQA responded by establishing a working group (membership shown in the Annex to this paper) to take forward this task. The working group has met on three occasions and this paper

contains its proposals. [EUA, EURASHE and ESIB declined ENQA's invitation to join the working group].

2 ENQA has worked to produce of proposed standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The standards are designed to be applicable to all higher education institutions (HEIs) irrespective of their structure, function, size, and the national system in which they are located. The standards are also intended to apply to the three cycles of higher education described in the Bologna Declaration (as revised). ENQA decided that, notwithstanding the request of Ministers, it would not be appropriate to include detailed 'procedures' in its recommendations, since institutional procedures were properly the responsibility of higher education institutions and represented an important part of their academic and organisational autonomy. It would be for the institutions themselves, operating within their individual national contexts, to decide the procedural consequences of adopting the standards contained in this paper. However, ENQA intends to provide guidance and information about the possible coverage of quality assurance procedures by describing the processes to which quality assurance might be applied.

3 As their starting point, the standards and guidelines endorse the spirit of the July 2003 Graz Declaration of the European University Association (EUA) which states that 'the purpose of a European dimension to quality assurance is to promote mutual trust and improve transparency while respecting the diversity of national contexts and subject areas'. Consonant with the Graz declaration, the standards and guidelines contained in this paper recognise the

primacy of national systems of higher education, the importance of institutional autonomy within those national systems, and the particular requirements of different academic subjects. In addition, the standards and guidelines owe much to the experience gained during the ENQA-coordinated pilot project 'Transnational European Evaluation Project' (TEEP)<sup>1</sup>, which investigated, in three disciplines, the operational implications of a European transnational quality evaluation process. The standards and guidelines also take into account the quality convergence study undertaken by ENQA in 2003<sup>2</sup>, which analysed the state of the art of European higher education evaluation procedures in terms of a number of specific themes and aspects. Further, they reflect the statement of Ministers in the Berlin communiqué that 'consistent with the principle of institutional autonomy, the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself and this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework'. In these standards and guidelines, therefore, an appropriate balance has been sought between the creation and development of internal quality cultures, and the role which external quality assurance procedures may play.

- 4 In addition to the work of ENQA and the EUA, these standards and guidelines have also benefited from the perspectives included in the ESIB policy paper, *Quality Assurance and Accreditation – improving quality and promoting mobility* (November 2003), the ESIB *Statement on Institutional Quality Assurance* (May 2003), and the EURASHE *Policy Statement on the Bologna Process* (June 2003).

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.enqa.net/texts/TEEPmethod.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.enqa.net/texts/procedures.pdf>

5 These standards and guidelines are based on a number of fundamental assumptions about the value, purpose and nature of quality assurance in higher education. These include:

the belief that providers of higher education have the primary responsibility for quality;

the need for protection of the interests of society in the quality of higher education;

the need to develop, maintain and improve academic programmes of high quality for students and other beneficiaries of higher education;

the need for the creation of efficient and effective organisational structures within which those academic programmes can be provided and supported;

the desirability of developing processes by which higher education institutions can demonstrate their accountability through the effective discharge of their responsibilities for quality assurance;

the importance of transparency and of a measure of externality in quality assurance processes;

the avoidance of over-regulation.

6 The purpose of these standards and guidelines is to provide a source of assistance and guidance to HEIs in developing their own culture of

quality assurance, and to contribute to a common frame of reference for the provision of higher education and the assurance of quality in the EHEA. It is not the intention that these standards and guidelines should dictate practice, be interpreted as prescriptive, or in any way require some rigid measure of compliance.

- 7 The standards and guidelines envisage an important role for the external evaluation of quality assurance processes. Such external evaluation largely depends for its full effectiveness on there being an explicit internal quality assurance strategy, with specific objectives, and on the use, within institutions, of mechanisms and methods aimed at achieving those objectives.

The reactions of the different partners in the process has ranged from enthusiasm by many of the higher education institution to disappointment by some of the quality assurance and accreditation agencies. The standards or principles under discussion are quite general and are designed to encompass the situation applying in all forty countries in the process. Agencies in counties in early stages of reform will be challenged while agencies with a long track record will wish for more detailed and specific targets.

I believe the results of the ENQA report if accepted by Ministers should form the basis for further developments in the two years to the next Ministerial Meeting in 2007. Those developments should focus on common accreditation methodologies and should draw on the substantial work of the European Consortium of Accreditation.

Finally, if I were to make a request to Ministers at their Bergen meeting it would be to schedule that 2007 meeting not less than 24 months from next year's meeting. Substantial progress will be made in the Berlin Bergen period but at some cost.

And yet lest I appear to blame the circumstances for the lack of progress, I might remind you that George Bernard Shaw also said that

“People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don't believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and if they can't find them, make them”.

Let us do just that.

Ends.