



COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

Brussels, 02.02.1998  
COM(97) 707 final

97/0121 (SYN)

Amended proposal for a  
COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION  
**CONCERNING EUROPEAN COOPERATION IN QUALITY ASSURANCE IN  
HIGHER EDUCATION**

(presented by the Commission pursuant to Article 189 a(2)  
of the EC Treaty)



## **EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM**

Following the Parliament's opinion as expressed at the First Reading on 18 November 1997, the Commission presents to the Council, in accordance with Article 189 A, paragraph 2 of the EC Treaty, a modified proposal for a recommendation. This text reflects two main groups of modifications:

- a group of amendments designed to provide useful clarifications and greater precision in relation to the original proposal;
- another group of amendments reinforcing the proposal, notably in relation to the diversity of education systems, the autonomy of higher education institutions and the invitation to Member States to participate actively in the creation of a European network for quality assurance.

The Commission's modified proposal preserves the same overall structure and the same objectives as its original proposal, but certain provisions have been developed and clarified.

Of the amendments proposed by the European Parliament, almost half have been accepted by the Commission.

The amendments considered problematical fall into the three following categories.

1) *Amendments relating to certain matters of principle that constitute the basis for the proposal*

- A number of amendments aim to eliminate the references to the Commission's White Paper on growth, competitiveness and employment and to the White Paper "Teaching and Learning". However, the references to these White Papers, cited in the preamble to the Commission's original proposal, form part of the justification for Community action in this field.
- A series of amendments propose a presentation in summary form of the principles that should characterise the national systems of quality assurance, the different stages of the quality assurance exercise, and the actors involved in each stage. Because this is a relatively new domain, the Commission prefers to retain the analytical approach including an explanation of the essential features, rather than the summary description proposed by Parliament.
- One amendment would eliminate the link between quality assurance and the labour market needs. This link, however, is important for the employability of graduates. Also, the legal basis of the proposed recommendation includes article 127 of the Treaty, in which article the labour market needs are explicitly referred to.

2) *Amendments raising questions that are outside the scope of the proposal*

- involvement of the associated countries of Central and Eastern Europe directly in the development of procedures for quality assurance and in the creation of the network. This poses a problem, because a reference to third countries in a Community instrument is not allowed. Moreover, only some of these countries participate in the relevant Community programmes.
- introduction of a recommendation to the Member States to establish systems for quality assurance in the field of research.

3) *Amendments introducing superfluous additions or developments, or alternative formulations that do not improve the original text*

- transferring or repeating parts of the legislative text in the preamble and vice-versa.
- repeating the aspect of the autonomy of the higher education institutions.

Amended proposal for a

COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

CONCERNING EUROPEAN COOPERATION IN QUALITY ASSURANCE IN  
HIGHER EDUCATION

## PROPOSITION INITIALE DE LA COMMISSION

### THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, and particularly Articles 126 and 127 thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the Commission,

Having regard to the opinion of the Economic and Social Committee,

Having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions,

Acting in accordance with the procedure referred to in Article 189c of the Treaty

Whereas a high quality of education and training at all levels is an objective for all Member States and whereas the Community is requested to contribute to its achievement by promoting cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action while fully respecting their responsibility for the content of teaching and the organisation of the education and training systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity;

Whereas the Council stated in its conclusions of 25 November 1991 that improving the quality of teaching in higher education is a concern shared by each Member State and by every higher education institution within the European Community; whereas in view of the diversity of methods used for quality assessment at national level, national experience could be complemented by European experience provided by a limited number of pilot projects aimed at establishing and strengthening cooperation in this area;

Whereas through developments and activities in the Member States as well as through transnational cooperation and the mobility of students and teaching staff (particularly in the framework of Community programmes such as SOCRATES and especially its ERASMUS chapter) the awareness of European higher education institutions of the need to be able to judge the quality of studies available in other countries and to compare it with that of studies available within their own systems has been substantially raised;

Whereas one of the main issues of the Commission memorandum on higher education highlights that the former view of a vertical quality hierarchy of educational institutions whose qualifications are traditionally considered as different entrance tickets to society is becoming increasingly obsolete; whereas the emphasis today is more on quality across the whole of education and within each institution; whereas quality should be guaranteed at all levels and in all sectors, with differences only in terms of objectives, methods and educational demand; whereas there is support for the introduction of efficient and acceptable methods of quality evaluation which are based on European cooperation and transnational exchange of experience and which emphasise the importance of quality assurance for strategic management as well as its cultural dimension;

Whereas a Commission study on the state of quality assurance in the Member States revealed that the new systems of quality assurance had certain points in common; whereas the two pilot projects conducted subsequently were based on these core elements of existing national systems; whereas they tested the common method successfully and showed that the actors in the field are all eager to pursue the exchange of experience during the reorganisation of higher education in general and the development of quality assurance in particular;

Whereas higher education institutions have not only to meet the educational and professional requirements of a world-wide 'knowledge society', but also to address social problems nationally; whereas they aim to guarantee the quality of teaching by developing new initiatives (individually or on a collaborative basis within higher education associations) in order to give the services they provide the required attributes;

## PROPOSITION MODIFIEE SUITE A L'AVIS DU PARLEMENT EUROPEEN DU 18 NOVEMBRE

### THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, and particularly Articles 126 and 127 thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the Commission,

Having regard to the opinion of the Economic and Social Committee,

Having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions,

Acting in accordance with the procedure referred to in Article 189c of the Treaty

Whereas a high quality of education and training at all levels is an objective for all Member States and whereas the Community is requested to contribute to its achievement by promoting cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action while fully respecting their responsibility for the content of teaching and the organisation of the education and training systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity;

Whereas the Council stated in its conclusions of 25 November 1991 that improving the quality of teaching in higher education is a concern shared by each Member State and by every higher education institution within the European Community; whereas in view of the diversity of methods used for quality assessment at national level, national experience could be complemented by European experience provided by a limited number of pilot projects aimed at establishing and strengthening cooperation in this area;

Whereas through developments and activities in the Member States as well as through transnational cooperation and the mobility of students and teaching staff (particularly in the framework of Community programmes such as SOCRATES and especially its ERASMUS chapter) the awareness of European higher education institutions of the need to be able to judge the quality of studies available in other countries and to compare it with that of studies available within their own systems has been substantially raised;

Whereas one of the main issues of the Commission memorandum on higher education highlights that quality should be guaranteed at all levels and in all sectors, with differences only in terms of objectives, methods and educational demand; whereas there is a support for the introduction of efficient and acceptable methods of quality evaluation which are based on European cooperation and transnational exchange of experience and which emphasise its role and cultural dimension;

Whereas due to differing education systems in the Community, the term "higher education institution", as used in this Recommendation, covers all types of institutions which offer qualifications or diplomas at that level, whatever such establishments may be called in the Member States; whereas this definition is used in the decision establishing the SOCRATES programme;

Whereas a Commission study on the state of quality assurance in the Member States revealed that the new systems of quality assurance had certain points in common; whereas the two pilot projects conducted subsequently were based on these core elements of existing national systems; whereas they tested the common method successfully and showed that the actors in the field are all eager to pursue the exchange of experience during the reorganisation of higher education in general and the development of quality assurance in particular;

Whereas higher education institutions have to meet the new educational and social requirements of a world-wide "knowledge society" and the resulting developments; whereas they aim to improve the quality of teaching by developing new initiatives (individually or on a collaborative basis within higher education associations) aimed at giving the services they provide the required attributes;

Whereas in view of the ever greater constraints of global competition as well as of mass education, authorities in all Member States face the task to tailor higher education systems and their relationships to state and society in ways which respect existing academic norms and values, and reinforce the autonomy and responsibility of higher education institutions;

Whereas the discussion of the Commission communication of 13 February 1994 has demonstrated that all Member States are currently considering introducing or overhauling systems to improve mutual recognition of academic or professional qualifications; whereas quality assurance in higher education can contribute to the necessary flexibility and help to modernise higher education institutions;

Whereas the White Paper *Growth, Competitiveness and Employment* identifies as a weakness at European level the lack of an open education area in the Community resulting from an insufficiently transparent system of qualifications; it considers the wealth of nations to be increasingly based on the creation and exploitation of knowledge and states that the key elements in competitiveness include the quality of education and training as well as the way in which corporate strategies are able to react to the changes in society;

Whereas the White Paper on Teaching and Learning and the premise of the "learning society", on which it is based, stresses the role of education and training as the "main vehicles for self-awareness, belonging, advancement and self-fulfilment", and that the "individual's place in relation to their fellow citizens will increasingly be determined by their capacity to learn and master fundamental knowledge"; as the social and cultural functions of education and training on the one hand and their economic functions on the other are indivisibly linked, demands in terms of the quality of education and training are correspondingly multidimensional and vitally important for all European citizens;

Whereas the Commission Green Paper on obstacles to transnational mobility highlights the difficulties encountered by students wishing to pursue their studies on a transnational basis and stresses that this type of mobility is essential for an education of high quality which can enable individuals to meet European and international standards and to take advantage of freedom of movement within the Community;

#### I. HEREBY RECOMMENDS TO MEMBER STATES:

- A. to establish, within their responsibilities for the organisation of their higher education systems, transparent quality assessment and quality assurance systems with the following aims:
- to safeguard the quality of higher education within the specific economic, social and cultural context of their countries while taking due account of the European dimension and of international requirements;
  - to help higher education institutions use quality assurance techniques as steering mechanisms to promote organisational flexibility for permanent improvement in a rapidly changing environment;
  - to underpin European and world-wide cooperation in order to benefit from each other's experience for the accomplishment of the two foregoing tasks;
- B. to base systems of quality assessment and quality assurance on the following principles:

Whereas the technological and economic changes and their consequences for the labour market pose new challenges for higher education institutions under increasingly difficult conditions, including a growing number of students accompanied by a shortage of financial resources; and therefore higher education institutions are required to ensure that students obtain a future-oriented education and to prepare them appropriately for the requirements of the labour market; whereas if these challenges are to be met, traditional academic norms and values must be the subject of reflection and the autonomy of higher education institutions must be reinforced;

Whereas the discussion of the Commission communication of 13 February 1994 has demonstrated that all Member States are currently considering introducing or overhauling systems to improve mutual recognition of academic or professional qualifications; whereas quality assurance in higher education can contribute to the necessary flexibility and help to modernise higher education institutions;

Whereas the White Paper *Growth, Competitiveness and Employment* identifies as a weakness at European level the lack of an open education area in the Community resulting from an insufficiently transparent system of qualifications; it considers the wealth of nations to be increasingly based on the creation and exploitation of knowledge and states that the key elements in competitiveness include the quality of education and training as well as the way in which corporate strategies are able to react to the changes in society;

Whereas the White Paper on Teaching and Learning and the premise of the "learning society", on which it is based, stresses the role of education and training as the "main vehicles for self-awareness, belonging, advancement and self-fulfilment", and that the "individual's place in relation to their fellow citizens will increasingly be determined by their capacity to learn and master fundamental knowledge"; as the social and cultural functions of education and training on the one hand and their economic functions on the other are indivisibly linked, demands in terms of the quality of education and training are correspondingly multidimensional and vitally important for all European citizens;

Whereas, pursuant to articles 126 and 127 of the Treaty, promoting mobility is a declared objective of the Community; whereas the Commission's Green Paper on obstacles to transnational mobility examines the principal legal, administrative and practical obstacles encountered by students wishing to study in another Member State and proposes measures to improve mobility; whereas it stresses that this type of mobility is essential for an education of high quality which can enable individuals to meet European and international standards and to take advantage of freedom of movement within the Community;

Whereas quality assurance systems vary from one Member State to another, since the size, structure, financial environment, institutional characteristics and pedagogical self-image of higher education institutions also differ; whereas the quality assurance systems should remain flexible and adaptable to new circumstances arising as a result of further developments in the structure and objectives of higher education institutions

#### I. HEREBY RECOMMENDS TO MEMBER STATES:

- A. to establish, in strict accordance with their responsibilities for the organisation of their higher education systems, their constitutional and budgetary requirements and the principle of the autonomy of higher education institutions, transparent quality assessment and quality assurance systems with the following aims:
- to safeguard the quality of higher education within the specific economic, social and cultural context of their countries while taking due account of the European dimension and of the rapidly changing world;
  - to encourage and help higher education institutions to use quality assurance techniques as a means of better meeting the requirements of a rapidly changing environment within the framework of the comprehensive education and research mandate of educational establishments in general;
  - to underpin European and world-wide cooperation in order to benefit from each other's experience for the accomplishment of the two foregoing tasks;
- B. to base systems of quality assessment and quality assurance on the following principles:

Autonomy and independence of the bodies responsible for quality assessment and quality assurance

*These bodies should be autonomous and independent in relation to the political authorities and to the higher education institutions themselves in relation to procedural and methodological matters.*

Relating evaluation procedures to the profile of institutions while respecting their autonomy

*Quality assessment and quality assurance procedures should involve questions of institutional self understanding, especially how they define their aims and objectives, be it at the level of the institution, of the department or of the discipline, in order to allow for diverse educational responses to different societal needs.*

Internal and external procedural elements

*All quality assessment and quality assurance procedures should consist of an internal, self-reflective component and an external component, based on the appraisal of external experts.*

Involvement of all the players

*The internal element should involve all the relevant players within the institution in the process of self-reflexion, especially teaching staff and administrators in charge of academic and professional guidance, as well as students.*

*The external element should be a process of cooperative consultation and advice between independent experts from outside and players from within the institution.*

*Alumni, social partners, professional associations and other interested social groups could be included in the expert groups in order to bring relevant social and professional criteria to bear.*

*It is recommended to include foreign experts from other Member States in the groups of external experts. They can contribute to quality assessment and assurance by providing experiences from abroad, relating the observed processes to standards prevailing in other countries and by fostering cultural understanding.*

Publication of evaluation reports

*Reports on quality assessment and assurance procedures and their outcomes should be published in a form appropriate to each Member State and should provide a source of good reference material for cooperation partners and for the interested public.*

- C. to ensure that follow-up measures are taken at national or regional or other level in order to enable higher education institutions to implement their plans for improving the quality of studies and for integrating graduates into the labour market more effectively.
- D. to ensure that high priority is given by public authorities and by the management of higher education institutions to continuous exchange of experience and cooperation in quality assessment and quality assurance with other Member States, as well as with international organisations and associations active in the field of higher education;

## II. AND, TO THIS END, REQUESTS THE COMMISSION :

- 1. to support the establishment of a "European Quality Assurance Network" of bodies responsible for quality assessment and quality assurance, designated by the Member States, and of organisations and associations within the European Community with quality assessment or quality assurance experience in the field of higher education;

The tasks of this "Network" could include:

Autonomy and independence of the bodies responsible for quality assessment and quality assurance

*These bodies should be autonomous and independent in relation to the political authorities and to the higher education institutions themselves in relation to procedural and methodological matters.*

Relating evaluation procedures to the profile of institutions while respecting their autonomy

*Quality assessment and quality assurance procedures should involve questions of institutional self understanding, especially how they define their aims and objectives, be it at the level of the institution, of the department or of the discipline, in order to allow for diverse educational responses to different societal needs.*

Internal and external procedural elements

*All quality assessment and quality assurance procedures should consist of an internal, self-reflective component and an external component, based on the appraisal of external experts.*

Involvement of all the players

*The internal element should involve all the relevant players within the institution in the process of self-reflexion, especially teaching staff and administrators in charge of academic and professional guidance, as well as students.*

*The external element should be a process of cooperative consultation and advice between independent experts from outside and players from within the institution.*

*Alumni, social partners, professional associations and other interested social groups could be included in the expert groups in order to bring relevant social and professional criteria to bear.*

*It is recommended to include foreign experts from other Member States in the groups of external experts. They can contribute to quality assessment and assurance by providing experiences from abroad, relating the observed processes to standards prevailing in other countries and by fostering cultural understanding.*

Publication of evaluation reports

*Reports on quality assessment and assurance procedures and their outcomes should be published in a form appropriate to each Member State and should provide a source of good reference material for cooperation partners and for the interested public.*

- C. to ensure that follow-up measures are taken at national or regional or other level in order to enable higher education institutions to implement their plans for improving the quality of studies and for integrating graduates into the labour market more effectively.
- D. to ensure that high priority is given by public authorities and by the management of higher education institutions to continuous exchange of experience and cooperation in quality assessment and quality assurance with other Member States, as well as with international organisations and associations active in the field of higher education;

## II. AND TO THIS END REQUESTS THE COMMISSION AND THE MEMBER STATES:

- 1. to support the expansion and completion of the existing structures for the creation of a "European Quality Assurance Network" of bodies responsible for quality assessment and quality assurance, designated by the Member States, and of organisations and associations within the European Community with quality assessment or quality assurance experience in the field of higher education;

The tasks of this "Network" could include:



- a) exchange of information and experience through European conferences, workshops and by using new technologies;
- b) technical assistance to individual Member State authorities in implementing concrete projects for establishing or improving quality assessment and quality assurance procedures and mechanisms;
- c) assistance to groups of higher education institutions from different Member States who wish to cooperate in quality assessment or assurance, particularly in the framework of the "Thematic Networks" under the ERASMUS Chapter of the SOCRATES programme;
- d) other assistance to higher education institutions including information on new methodological developments and examples of good practice, facilitating contact with international experts by forming a "pool" or preparing a "tool kit" of methodological instruments for obtaining information necessary for quality assessment and quality assurance procedures;
- e) linking quality assurance with other Community activities developed especially in the framework of the SOCRATES and the LEONARDO DA VINCI programmes, or with the recognition of qualifications at European level;
- f) preparation of methods to achieve better integration of graduates in the European labour market;

The "European Quality Assurance Network" will be eligible for financial support in the framework of the SOCRATES and the LEONARDO DA VINCI programmes, subject to their objectives and normal procedures. A tangible business sector involvement in the assurance of quality in higher education is necessary for the latter, but is also desirable for SOCRATES;

2. to present every two years reports to the Council, to the European Parliament and other relevant institutions of the European Community on the development of quality assessment and quality assurance systems in the Member States and on cooperation activities at European level;

in the light of these reports, to submit appropriate proposals to strengthen quality assurance in higher education.

- a) exchange of information and experience, for example, through European conferences, workshops and by using modern information and communication technologies;
- b) technical assistance to individual Member State authorities in implementing concrete projects for establishing or improving quality assessment and quality assurance procedures and mechanisms
- c) assistance to groups of higher education institutions from different Member States who wish to cooperate in quality assessment or assurance, particularly in the framework of the "Thematic Networks" under the ERASMUS Chapter of the SOCRATES programme;
- d) other assistance to higher education institutions including information on new methodological developments and examples of good practice, facilitating contact with international experts, for example, by forming a "pool" or preparing a "tool kit" of methodological instruments for obtaining information necessary for quality assessment and quality assurance procedures;
- e) linking quality assurance with other Community activities developed especially in the framework of the SOCRATES and the LEONARDO DA VINCI programmes, or with the recognition of qualifications at European level;
- f) preparation of methods to achieve better integration of graduates in the European labour market;

The "European Quality Assurance Network" will be eligible for financial support in the framework of the SOCRATES and the LEONARDO DA VINCI programmes, subject to their objectives and normal procedures ensuring openness and transparency. A tangible business sector involvement in the assurance of quality in higher education is necessary for the latter, but is also desirable for SOCRATES;

### III. AND REQUESTS THE COMMISSION

1. to present every two years reports to the Council, to the European Parliament and other relevant institutions of the European Community on the development of quality assessment and quality assurance systems in the Member States, on cooperation activities at European level and on the progress achieved with respect to the objectives referred to above;

in the light of these reports, to submit appropriate proposals to strengthen quality assurance in higher education and cooperation among the Member States





ISSN 0254-1475

COM(97) 707 final

# DOCUMENTS

EN

01 15 16

---

Catalogue number : CB-CO-97-727-EN-C

ISBN 92-78-29635-X

---

Office for Official Publications of the European Communities

L-2985 Luxembourg