

Minutes
Professional and Specialized Accreditors Meeting
7 December 2010
CTI, 34 Avenue Charles de Gaulle,
Paris France

Present: David Woodhouse (INQAAHE), Rafael Llavori (INQAAHE) Nadia Badrawi (INQAAHE), Esther van den Heuvel (INQAAHE), Jeremy Cox (AEC), Jean-Claude Arditti (CTI), Isabel Fernandez (European Federation of Geologists), Hendrik Ferdinande (EPS), Rui Costa (ISEKI Food Association), Pavel Drasar (ECTN), Pavel Nastase (ARACIS, Romania)

Apologies: Frauke Muth (EQANIE), Teresa Sanchez-Chaparro (CTI)

Background

David Woodhouse (DW), President of INQAAHE, opened the meeting, thanked those present for attending at short notice, and invited all to introduce themselves. DW provided some background information about INQAAHE. In addition to the public material, INQAAHE provides some services for Members only, and also provides focused assistance from time to time to particular groups of members (eg agencies in small states, institutions, professional and specialised accreditors).

For the last-named group, INQAAHE has convened meetings where they can share their experiences. In January 2009 and 2010 these meetings were organised during the CHEA conference in Washington, USA and attracted professional associations only from North America. INQAAHE aims to organise a special session for professional accreditors during its upcoming annual conference 4-7 April 2011 in Madrid, Spain. The opportunity arose, at short notice, to have this meeting of professional associations in Europe, both to share information and to plan for a meeting in April 2011.

Topics

DW proposed the following questions to be the topics of this meeting:

1. Do you think INQAAHE can offer anything specific to professional accreditors?
2. INQAAHE has a special section for professional accreditors on the website, which was created at the request of participants in the earlier meetings, but at the moment this section is not used much. How can this be improved?
3. What should we plan for Madrid in April?

Jeremy Cox (JC) commented that the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) provides a opportunity to open the accreditation possibilities for disciplinary accreditation instead of national accreditation being the only legal option. At the moment jurisdictions do not allow disciplinary accreditation in Europe. Accreditation is only possible through national accreditation systems but perhaps in the future institutions might have the possibility for choosing between disciplinary (not nation bound) accreditation or a national accreditation.

The European Association of Conservatoires (AEC) is currently working with national agencies and institutions on different projects such as the creation of learning

outcomes on a European level but also disciplinary accreditation by AEC on a voluntary basis. Joint exercises between institutions, national agencies and the professional agency are being carried out.

Rui Costa (RC) informed the participants that as a result of a common need, specialized standards in food studies have been identified and a quality label has been developed recently. He is not sure if the organisation, which is in its starting phase, can already be placed in the category of professional accreditors.

Isabel Fernandez (IF): European Federation of Geologists has developed a 'passport' that recognizes the quality of individual European geologists. The passport has no legal basis, and hence is of limited value in Europe, but is recognized / used in Australia, Canada, South Africa and the USA.

Hendrik Ferdinande (HF) described the creation of a European specification for Bachelor and Master studies in Physics: this tool includes Learning Outcomes and Dublin Descriptors and can be consulted online: <http://www.eps.org>

Global Networks

Discussion how mutual recognition of accreditation decisions is related to disciplinary accreditations. Would it be possible to overcome the need for MR by agencies referring authority to a broader entity? (This works in some federal political systems where the component states have constitutional powers that they may refer to the federal government (and may reclaim if they wish).)

Nadia Badrawi (NB) reported on the current process to create a global consortium for paediatric education (GPEC). As this is a sector where everyone should have the same competences, a list of global competences will be developed. In due course, the consortium will be in position to certify that an institution is using and offering the specified curriculum.

Recently a similar initiative has been developed by the International Federation of Nurse Anaesthetists. There is a general trend that more and more professional sectors are developing labels/certificates.

Pavel Nastase (PN) spoke of the International Federation for Accountants and its international curriculum, and mentioned the gap between the HEIs and the professional life. This can be exacerbated if the general accreditor takes no cognisance of the professional requirements. ARACIS therefore has both a general standard and 12 specialised standards that are used for the different twelve sectors.

National or Discipline Emphasis?

The representatives of the professional accreditors think that the work of the national agencies is too general. On the other hand, national agencies do think that certain QA aspects need to be measured at a central level. It is necessary to bring together the discipline (perhaps in the guise of international professional associations) and the general accreditors.

Jean Claude Arditti(JCA) commented that the profession of an engineer is not regulated in all countries while medicine is. The participants agreed that any

profession can be regulated but this cannot be forced. It is important that there is good cooperation between institutions and professional agencies.

Rafael Llavori (RL): Subsidiarity has been a key word in Europe, meaning that decisions are devolved, often to regions within countries. While there is obvious value in the consequent specialisation, it has resulted in a lack of discussion of some subjects at the national level. Broader discussion might, inter alia, lead to harmonised learning outcomes.

Pavel Drasar (PD): stressed the importance of having the same vocabulary used by disciplinary and national accreditation agencies. He also observed that industry influence can be similar in different countries, so different agencies are subject to pressure in a similar direction.

Action

1. An on-line forum during the next few months.
The foci of this discussion should be:
 - a. the relative benefits of becoming either professional accrediting organisations (the idea of the Conservatoires, Engineers, etc.) or interested in an international evaluation based upon international experts (food studies, geologists) more aligned with the good practices/clearinghouse proposals of INQAAHE.
 - b. clarify the different evolutionary stage of those labels more 'developed' (chemistry/eurobachelor and engineers would be the best examples) and those placed in a more recent phase.
 - c. sharing possible suggestions for Madrid meeting in terms of finding points for discussion for disciplines/professional accreditors vs national/regional accreditation agencies and ways of interacting/collaboration (next comment below).
 - d. identify the goals of the Madrid meeting
2. Discussion between a QA agency (eg ANECA) and a label organisation (eg ECTN) about commonality, eg using four programs (large/small, public/private) as a pilot study. What are the different emphases (threshold / improvement)? What can be carried out by one body on behalf of the other?

Bearing in mind a rigid legal higher education tradition (e.g. Spain) the key point would be to work out the 'excellence' learning outcome approach used by the label organisations for bachelor and master cycles matching the threshold one provided by the generalist agencies to be sure that the basic legal requirements and specific national-rooted academic issues are also met by that approach. That would be one prior methodological/theoretical stage of the pilot study.

3. Then, the practical phase of a subsequent pilot would consist in an on-site testing that more flexible, simplified procedure with international experts of the agency and the label organisation in a 'living environment'.

The results would help to align both approaches and to allow label organisations to do their work on a disciplinary-oriented context and national accreditation agencies to maintain the mandate of the law of taking care of QA in their respective jurisdiction in a more cooperative setting (or rather the contrary!,

depending on the results). Thus the agency could suggest corrections and amendments to the legal accreditation framework on sound evidences.

4. As most national accreditation systems use criteria and standards which, upon analysis, reveal a similar approach (and sometimes actual common ancestry) a mapping exercise to make such correspondences explicit could be a useful preliminary to exploring possibilities for trans-national and sectorally-based cooperation in accreditation exercises. Since there will inevitably be some elements unique to each national system, it would be helpful to attempt to clarify what is needed to permit a judgement of 'substantial similarity' when using another national protocol or a sectoral one in an officially-sanctioned context - i.e. to grant or withhold accrediting approval to an institution or programme.
5. Also for Madrid, all agreed that it would be good to identify some experienced actors from the USA to share their experiences about quality labels and/or accreditation.
6. Call for presentation of Good Practices where (at the European level) three stakeholders have been involved: HE institutions, professional accreditors and national accreditation agencies,
7. When sending these minutes to the participants they will be asked again to come up with some materials that can be posted on the special website section of the INQAAHE website.
8. A suggestion was made to involve, if possible, professional accreditors in the accreditation of joint programmes in the JOQAR project of ECA.