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### **Accreditation of Educational Programmes in the European Region**

#### **Reform in Higher Education**

In 1999 Ministers responsible for Higher Education in European countries signed the Bologna Declaration. They agreed on joint objectives for the development of a coherent and cohesive European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by the year 2010. The subsequent Berlin Declaration reads as follows: “The quality of higher education has proven to be at the heart of the setting up for a European Higher Education Area.” As a result the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education was invited to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance and to explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer review system for quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies or bodies. The framework for qualifications should be an overarching framework with a high level of generality, consisting of three main cycles; the framework should include cycle descriptors in the form of generic qualification descriptors that can be used as reference points.

#### **Accreditation in Higher Education**

Although the concept of “accreditation” or “quality assurance” as such does not occur in the BD, the effect of Bologna was that accreditation became a high priority on the political agenda. Accreditation is a decision about whether or not certain set standards have been met. It is concerned with taking a formal, independent decision on whether or not certain requirements are met. The descriptors for Bachelors and Masters are an empty shell as long as there are no domain-specific and professional standards to give substance to them. The question of levels can only be answered if such domain-specific standards have been set. Whereas the national Accreditation Organisations provide criteria for Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in their frameworks, it is usually left to experts and members of the expert team to define the domain-specific standards, those national-level dominated procedures do not cater for specific assessment.

#### **Accreditation of Public Health Programmes**

An attempt to define specific and content driven standards for accreditation and licensing purposes in the domain of public health is the aim of a Leonardo da Vinci project, entitled: “The establishment of a European Accreditation System for Public Health Education”. As of 2005, six universities throughout Europe (PL, DK, BG, UK, F, and NL) in close collaboration with the Association of Schools of Public Health in the European Region (ASPHER) and the European Public Health Alliance (EUPHA) are defining standards and are intending to establish an organisational entity for the accreditation of programmes in public health.