



organ für akkreditierung und qualitätssicherung  
der schweizerischen hochschulen

## **Media news release**

### **OAQ signs European agreement on accreditation in higher education**

Zurich, 3 December 2004: Members of the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) have signed a Code of Good Practice, marking an important step towards harmonisation in the European Higher Education Area. The signing by 12 university accreditation agencies from eight countries, including Switzerland, took place at the ECA's annual meeting in Zurich. The code, which regulates accreditation procedures in higher education with unified standards and establishes concrete requirements for the internal quality management of the accreditation agencies, will be the basis for future mutual recognition of accreditation decisions by ECA member countries. Dr. Rolf Heusser, the Director of the Centre of Accreditation and Quality Assurance for the Swiss Universities (OAQ) signed for Switzerland.

#### **Strengthening the value of accreditation**

At the ECA workshop, delegates also approved a joint principle paper on the future value of accreditation in higher education in Europe. The ECA says it is convinced that the importance of accreditation in higher education in education policy will continue to gain ground. The mutual recognition of accreditation decisions facilitates the international recognition of final examinations and diplomas. The ECA principle paper also calls for the regulation of the complex education market at the international level and appeals to European education ministers to link national and international recognition of educational institutions and study courses at the university level with prior accreditation or equivalent quality assessments.

Accreditation involves a formal and transparent quality assessment procedure which uses defined and internationally-compatible standards to assess whether higher education institutions and their study courses meet minimum quality requirements.

#### **From Berlin 2003 to Bergen 2005**

The results of the ECA workshop will be revised in preparation for the conference of education ministers from 40 European countries in Bergen, Norway and made available to the European Bologna Follow-up Group. The policy ideas formulated in Berlin in 2003 have been mostly implemented. Nearly all European countries have in the meantime set up higher education accreditation systems. The Berlin ministers' conference also called for the development of mutually recognised guidelines, criteria and methods of quality assurance. To meet this requirement, the European Consortium for Accreditation was founded in 2003.



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### **OAQ to take over ECA chair**

Since its founding, the OAQ has placed the greatest value on international cooperation. It is one of the founding members of the ECA and is in the Management Group. The Code of Good Practice signed at the ECA workshop in Zurich was prepared by the OAQ. The OAQ, together with accreditation organisations from Germany and Austria, took an active part in the development of the principle paper on accreditation in Europe. In recognition of its work, the OAQ, represented by its director Rolf Heusser, will take over the ECA chair in 2005.

Please address any questions to

Dr. Rolf Heusser, Director OAQ

Rolf Heusser can be reached by telephone at +41 (0)79 279 25 94

Friday, 3 December 2004 from 2.30 p.m. to 5 p.m. and

Saturday, 4 December 2004 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

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The Code of Good Practice and the principle paper on accreditation in Europe is available at [www.oaq.ch](http://www.oaq.ch) under the heading News

Both documents are available only in English.

Links:

[www.oaq.ch](http://www.oaq.ch) Center of Accreditation and Quality Assurance of the Swiss Universities, Bern

[www.eaconsortium.net](http://www.eaconsortium.net) European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA)

### **The Center of Accreditation and Quality Assurance of the Swiss Universities (OAQ)**

The OAQ is an independent authority set up in 2001 by the federal government and the Swiss University conference (CUS) to ensure and improve the quality of teaching and research at Swiss universities. A Scientific Advisory Board supports the work of the OAQ. By August 2004, the OAQ had successfully completed the first 10 accreditation procedures. In the meantime, further procedures have been initiated at the request of the universities.

### **The European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA)**

The European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education is a union of national accreditation authorities. It was founded in November 2003 with the aim of regulating in a unified way the work of accreditation organisations in Europe thus creating the prerequisite for future cross-border recognition of national accreditation decisions. The goal of "mutual recognition of accreditation decisions" should be reached by 2007 at the latest. The first interim results were presented at the ECA annual workshop in Zurich 2-3 December 2004.