

Foreword

The chapters in this book are based on the presentations given at the *Academia Europaea/Compagnia di San Paolo* conference on Quality Assessment in Higher Education in Europe, which was held at the University of Pavia in 2006. I thank the University and its Rector, Angiolino Stella, for their kind hospitality in the *Aula Foscolo* and the *Collegio Giason del Maino*.

The *Academia Europaea* was established in 1988 by the initiative of the Royal Society and several European Science Ministers, with Sir Arnold Burgen as its first President. The offices of the Academy are in London, and its membership runs to about 2000 scholars who come from all European countries. Many of the delegates of the conference, I am glad to say, were among our members.

The ideas behind this foundation and one of the goals that we set for ourselves are those of any Academy of Science, but it has always been directed at the European level. Its aims are to promote a wider appreciation of the value of European scholarship and research, to encourage interdisciplinarity and international research in all areas of learning, particularly in relation to European issues, to identify topics of importance to science and scholarship, and last, but not least, to promote a better understanding among the public at large of the benefits of knowledge and learning. The Academy organizes workshops, conferences and study groups, and gives advice in matters of European science policy.

Quality assessment is a hot topic today, for all institutions of higher education in Europe and for education policy in general. The *Academia Europaea* is deeply involved in that issue. It has dealt with it in a number of workshops, e.g. on *New Challenges for the Academic Profession* (1996 in Rotterdam), on *Interdisciplinarity and the Organisation of Knowledge in Europe* (1997 in Cambridge), and on the “*Virtual University*” (1999 in Stockholm). It has set up the *Hercules (higher education, research and culture in European society)* group, which was the co-ordinator of this conference, in order to strengthen the Academy’s engagement in this area. And it has always stated the need for greater transparency and accountability of universities in order to achieve the goal of a “*Europe of learning*”, for example in response to the European Commission consultation document on the role of universities in the Europe of knowledge. And this, again, was the objective of this conference.

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