The Framework for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)

Workshop for Higher Education Institutions
Astana, 2 March 2017
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Topics

1. ESG 2015 – the main changes
2. EQAR's role in the EHEA
3. External quality assurance across borders
4. Quality assurance of joint programmes
History

First intentions:
“Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance”
(Bologna Communiqué)

Common principles:
Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA
(Bergen)

Closer integration:
“allow EQAR-registered agencies to perform their activities across the EHEA”
(Bucharest)

Initial commitment:
Key elements of quality assurance systems
(Berlin)

European organisation:
European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR)
(London)

Further consolidation:
ESG revised, European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes
(Yerevan)
European Framework for Quality Assurance in HE

- **Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG)**
  - Common framework
  - Enable assurance and improvement
  - Support mutual trust

- **European Quality Assurance Register for HE (EQAR)**
  - Transparency of QA
  - Information on bona fide agencies
  - Mutual trust and recognition

- **Qualifications Framework of the EHEA (QF EHEA)**
  - Three levels (Ba, Ma, PhD)
  - Learning outcomes
  - ECTS ranges

- **European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes**
  - Agreed standards and procedure for joint programmes
1) Standards and Guidelines for QA in the EHEA (ESG)

- Common standards for:
  1) Internal quality assurance
  2) External quality assurance
  3) Quality assurance agencies

- Developed jointly by the main stakeholders
  - Higher education institutions – EUA, EURASHE
  - Students – ESU
  - Quality assurance agencies – ENQA

- Agreed by ministers in 2005, revised in 2015
ESG 2005 → 2015

- Starting points for revision:
  - Analysis of implementation by stakeholders (MAP-ESG)
  - Ministerial mandate: “improve their **clarity**, **applicability** and **usefulness**, including their **scope**”
  - Keep strength, overcome weaknesses

- Technical improvements
  - Remove ambiguity (e.g. status of standards vs guidelines)
  - Reflect how ESG are used (e.g. criteria for EQAR)

- Adapt to new developments
  - Reflect progress and developments in QA
  - Internationalisation
  - New modes of learning
ESG – purposes

- Set a common framework for quality assurance systems at European, national and institutional level;
- Enable the assurance and improvement of quality;
- Support mutual trust, thus facilitating recognition and mobility within and across national borders;
- Provide information on quality assurance in the EHEA.
The focus of the ESG is on quality assurance related to learning and teaching in higher education, including the learning environment and relevant links to research and innovation. [...] 

The ESG apply to all higher education offered in the EHEA regardless of the mode of study or place of delivery. Thus, the ESG are also applicable to all higher education including transnational and cross-border provision. [...] 

Higher education aims to fulfil multiple purposes; [...] Therefore, stakeholders, who may prioritise different purposes, can view quality in higher education differently and quality assurance needs to take into account these different perspectives. Quality, whilst not easy to define, is mainly a result of the interaction between teachers, students and the institutional learning environment. Quality assurance should ensure a learning environment in which the content of programmes, learning opportunities and facilities are fit for purpose. [...] 

The term ‘quality assurance’ is used in this document to describe all activities within the continuous improvement cycle (i.e. assurance and enhancement activities).
ESG – principles

- Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for quality
- Responds to the diversity of systems, institutions, programmes and students
- Support the development of a quality culture;
- Take into account the needs and expectations of students, all other stakeholders and society
ESG – internal QA

- Institutional policy for QA – see ESG 1.1
- Managing quality of study programmes
  - Design and approval – see ESG 1.2
  - **Objectives and learning outcomes in line with qualifications framework** (NQF & QF-EHEA)
    - Student-centred teaching, learning, assessment – 1.3
    - Admission, progression, **recognition** – 1.4
    - Ongoing monitoring – 1.9
- Staff, resources, student support – 1.5 & 1.6
- Information management & public information – 1.7 & 1.8
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ESG 2005 – Part 1</th>
<th>ESG 2015 – Part 1</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1.1 Policy and procedures for quality assurance</strong></td>
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<td><strong>1.2 Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.2 Design and approval of programmes</strong></td>
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<td><strong>1.3 Assessment of students</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment</strong></td>
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<td><strong>1.4 Quality assurance of teaching staff</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification</strong></td>
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<td><strong>1.5 Learning resources and student support</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.5 Teaching staff</strong></td>
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<td><strong>1.6 Information systems</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.6 Learning resources and student support</strong></td>
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<td><strong>1.7 Information management</strong></td>
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<td><strong>1.8 Public information</strong></td>
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<td><strong>1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance</strong></td>
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*(table: Achim Hopbach)*
ESG – external QA

- Fitness for purpose
  - **Address ESG Part 1** – see ESG 2.1
  - Methodology – at institutional or programme level, or both – 2.2
  - Criteria transparent and consistent – 2.5

- Four-stage model – 2.3
  - Self-evaluation or self-assessment
  - External assessment by groups of experts, including **student(s)**, expert and site visit – 2.4
    - Guideline: international expert(s), employers/practitioners
  - Public report **in full** and (if accreditation/audit) decision – 2.6
  - Follow-up procedure

- Appeals and complaints – 2.7
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<td>2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance</td>
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<td>2.3 Implementing processes</td>
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<td>2.6 Follow-up procedures</td>
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<td>2.8 System-wide analyses</td>
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(table: Achim Hopbach)
ESG – QA agencies

- Clear and explicit mission – 3.1
- Activities
  - External QA in line with ESG Part 2 – 3.1
  - **Involve stakeholders** – 3.1
  - Thematic analyses – 3.4
- Status and Independence – 3.2, 3.3
- Resources – 3.5
- Internal QA and **professional conduct** – 3.6
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<td>3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance</td>
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<td>3.3 Activities</td>
<td>3.3 Independence</td>
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<td>3.4 Resources</td>
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<td>3.6 Independence</td>
<td>3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct</td>
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<td>3.7 Cyclical external review of agencies</td>
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(table: Achim Hopbach)
More firmly embedded in “EHEA infrastructure” (e.g. links to QF, Lisbon Convention, ECTS, etc.)

Reflecting new developments in European HE

More common ground in QA across Europe

EHEA has grown closer together over last 10 years
2. European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR)

**Mission:** enhancing trust and confidence

**Role:** manage the register of QAAs that comply substantially with the ESG

- Established by E4 at Ministers' request, jointly governed by stakeholders and governments
- Non-profit and independent, acting in the public interest
- Objectives:
  - Enhance trust
  - Prevent "accreditation mills" from gaining credibility
  - Recognition of QA decisions and results
  - Allow registered QAAs to operate across the entire EHEA, HEIs to choose suitable QAA
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<td>Registration based on external review of agency</td>
<td>Annual updates on reviews and countries</td>
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<td>Substantive change reports</td>
<td>Third-party complaints</td>
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<td>Periodic renewal every 5 years</td>
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EQAR-registered agencies

- 44 registered QAAs
- Governmental members without registered agency
Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan has been a Governmental Member of EQAR since 2012.

Focus of external quality assurance

- Programme Accreditation
- Institutional Accreditation

Can higher education institutions choose a suitable EQAR-registered agency?

Yes

- Eligibility requirements for foreign agencies: Kazakh higher education institutions (HEIs) can choose from amongst QA listed in the national register of agencies. EQAR-registered agencies are automatically included in the national register.
- Conditions for the agencies' work (e.g. criteria to be used): own criteria.
- Recognition of reviews carried out by foreign agencies: automatic.
- Further information/regulations: [Bologna National Report (2015)]

Can higher education institutions use the European Approach for the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes?

Yes. all Kazakh higher education institutions can opt for programme accreditation of joint degrees by an EQAR registered agency using the European Approach.

Registered agencies based in this country:
Planned: database of external QA results

VU University of Amsterdam

1. Basic information
Country: Netherlands
Website: http://vu.nl/nl/index.aspx
NGF and QF-EHEA cycles: First, Second and Third Cycle

2. National External Quality Assurance System
Obligatory external quality assurance required in the Netherlands:
- Programme accreditation (required if no institutional audit)
- Institutional audits (optional)

3. External Quality Assurance Reports and Decisions
3.a Institutional level

Institutional Audit by NVAO
- Status: Part of the obligatory EQA system
- Formal decision: yes, positive with conditions or restrictions
- Date: 2014-09-03
- Valid until: 2016-09-02
- Report and decision: Audit report (language: English), Audit decision (language: Dutch)

Institutional Evaluation by IEP
- Status: Voluntary
- Formal decision: no
- Date: 2014-01-23
- Valid until: n/a
- Report and decision: Evaluation report (language: English)

3.b Programme level

Architecture (Accreditation by NVAO)

Biology (Accreditation by NVAO)

Liberal Arts and Sciences (Accreditation by NVAO)
- Status: Part of the obligatory EQA system
- Formal decision: yes, positive
- Date: 2014-01-27
- Valid until: 2020-01-26
- Qualification: Bachelor of Arts (Amsterdam University College) (joint degree)
- NQF and QF-EHEA level: First cycle
- Report and decision: Accreditation report (language: English), Accreditation decision (language: Dutch)

Mechatronics (Accreditation by ASIIN)

Public Administration (Accreditation by EAPAA)
- Status: Voluntary
- Formal decision: yes, positive with conditions or restrictions
- Date: 2014-09-03
- Valid until: 2016-09-02
- Report and decision: Accreditation report (language: English), Accreditation decision (language: Dutch)
Planned features

- Search and browsing
  - HEI name
  - By country
  - By agency
  - By date
  - By type of review
- Historic record available
- Full download
- Can be embedded into 3rd-party applications
3. External quality assurance across borders
## CBQA: opportunities & challenges

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<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
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| **Higher Education Institutions** | - International visibility  
- Valuable feedback  
- Increased commitment  
- Different approaches  
- Suit their own mission | - Identify suitable agency  
- Workload and costs  
- Unknown expectations  
- Language |
| **Quality Assurance Agencies** | - International profile  
- Experience relevant for work at home  
- Diversification | - Unfamiliar context  
- Adapting standards  
- Language |
CBQA: national legal frameworks lag behind

- Despite the robust European framework in place …
  - Cross-border accreditation/evaluation not fully recognised
  - In addition/parallel to obligatory national external QA
  - Duplication of efforts for institutions

- Recognising EQAR-registered agencies as part of the national requirements for external QA
- Recognising foreign agencies with own/specific framework
- Discussions ongoing
- Countries not recognising external QA by foreign agency
E4/EQAR: Key Considerations for CBQA

- E4 Group and EQAR ad-hoc group, following up recommendation from RIQAA project (2012)
- Reaffirm ESG as the basis for CB QA
- Key issues that should be taken into consideration by HEIs and QAAs:
  - A. Engaging in cross-border QA
    Rationale, suitable agency, legal framework, internal and external stakeholders
  - B. Carrying out cross-border QA
    Procedures, preparation, expert selection/training, practical specificities
  - C. Addressing the results of cross-border QA
    Recognition, complaints, appeals, follow-up
4. Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes

Background:

- Approaches and pilots for single reviews (e.g. JOQAR)
  - Working, but complex
- Need to accommodate different national criteria
  - Not always quality-related, but often structural
  - Sometimes contradictory (e.g. # of ECTS Master thesis)
  - Make sense nationally, but difficult to understand for foreign peers
- Consequence
  - “fragmented” external QA a common solution
European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes

- **Aims**
  - Ease accreditation of joint programmes
  - Enable single reviews, reflect the joint character also in QA

- **Approach**
  - Agreed and consistent European framework
    - Standards for quality assurance of joint programmes
    - Procedure for quality assurance of joint programmes
  - No additional national criteria
  - Adopted by EHEA ministers in Yerevan (May 2015)
Application

European Approach, based on ESG & QF-EHEA, and Bucharest Communiqué
(“recognise QA decisions of EQAR-registered agencies on joint and double degree programmes“)

Cooperating HEIs need programme accreditation/eval.

Single accreditation/eval. of JP, based on agreed Standards & Procedure, by any EQAR-reg. agency

Cooperating HEIs are “self-accrediting” for programmes, i.e. accredited/evaluated/audited at institutional level

Joint internal QA review of the JP (in line with ESG), may use agreed Standards, external review takes account of HEIs' internal

Recognised to fulfil QA requirements in all countries involved
### In a nutshell

<table>
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<th>Before</th>
<th>After</th>
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<tr>
<td>Multiple, fragmented reviews</td>
<td>Single review</td>
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<tr>
<td>Combining various national rules and criteria</td>
<td>Agreed Standards, based on ESG &amp; QF-EHEA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Complex procedures, ad hoc design</td>
<td>Agreed Procedure</td>
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Availability of the European Approach

All higher education institutions are able to use the European Approach to satisfy national QA requirements:
- Recognition of single external QA procedure for programmes
- HEIs being self-accrediting

Some higher education institutions or only under specific conditions:

Discussions ongoing

Cannot be used to satisfy national QA requirements.
Slow implementation?

- Possible reasons:
  - Hesitation to change national rules?
  - Too specific of a matter for separate change of law?
  - On “wait list” until next bigger change/reform?
  - Lack of demand from HE institutions?
  - Lack of urgency?

- But: which EHEA reform was implemented within a year…?
In practice: reflections

- Keen interest expressed by HE institutions
- QA agencies generally ready to use the EA
- Very few practical examples to date
- Why?
  - HEIs and QAAs constrained by national rules
  - Number of JP is not huge, how many needed programme accreditation since May 2015?
  - Re-accreditation following existing solution?
  - Waiting for others to make first experiences?
A vision for QA, Trust and Automatic Recognition
Thank you for your attention!

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