

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

Workshop for Higher Education Institutions

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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)

1999

2003

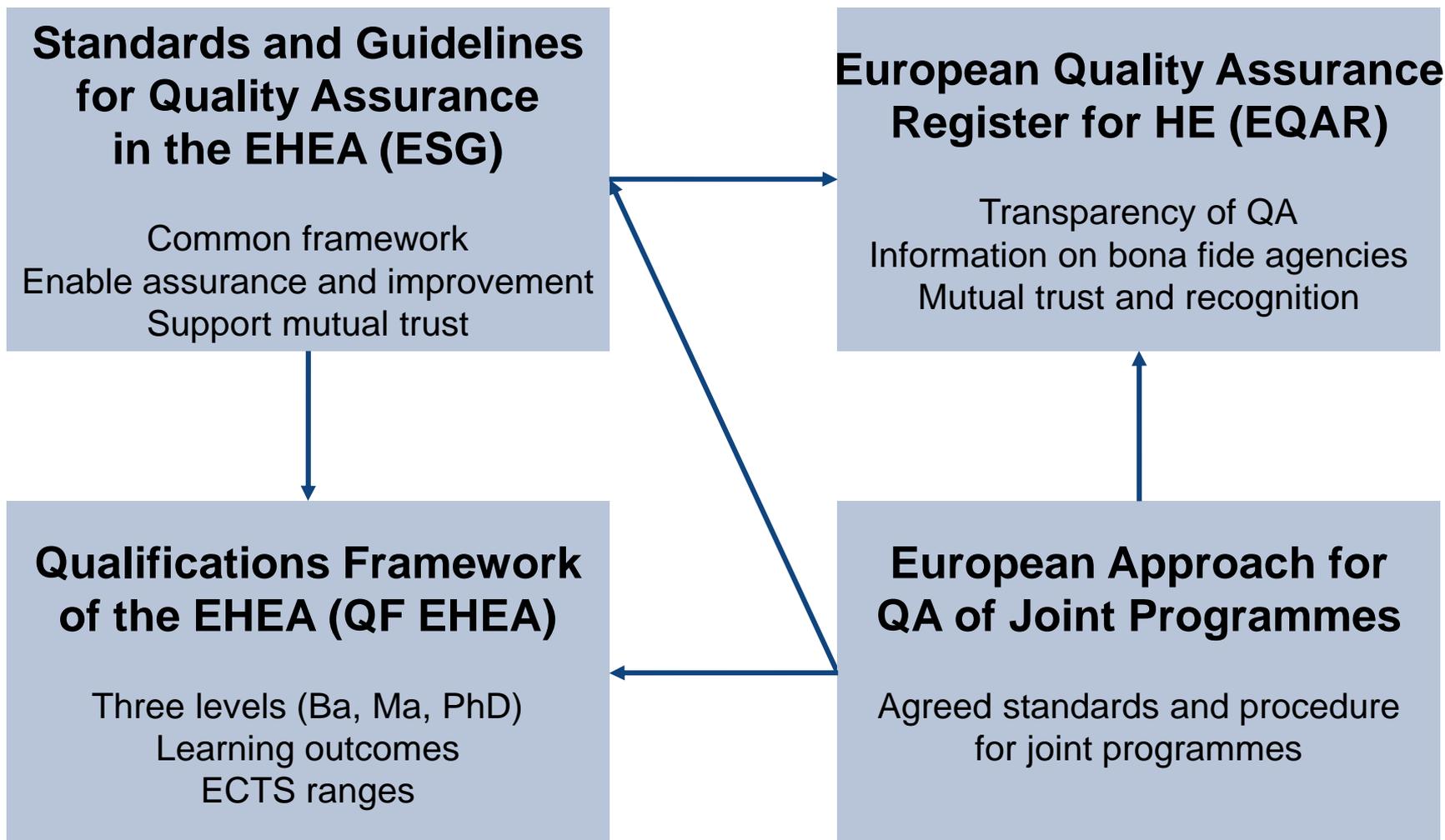
2005

2007

2012

2015

European Framework for Quality Assurance in HE



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
 - Staff & employers – Education International, BusinessEurope (2015)
- 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.

ESG – scope



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

ESG 2005 – Part 1	ESG 2015 – Part 1
1.1 Policy and procedures for quality assurance	1.1 Policy for quality assurance
1.2 Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards	1.2 Design and approval of programmes
1.3 Assessment of students	1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment
1.4 Quality assurance of teaching staff	1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification
1.5 Learning resources and student support	1.5 Teaching staff
1.6 Information systems	1.6 Learning resources and student support
1.7 Public information	1.7 Information management
	1.8 Public information
	1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes
	1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance

(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

ESG 2005 – Part 2		ESG 2015 – Part 2
2.1 Use of internal quality assurance procedures		2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance
2.2 Development of external quality assurance processes		2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose
2.3 Criteria for decisions		2.3 Implementing processes
2.4 Processes fit for purpose		2.4 Peer-review experts
2.5 Reporting		2.5 Criteria for outcomes
2.6 Follow-up procedures		2.6 Reporting
2.7 Periodic reviews		2.7 Complaints and appeals
2.8 System-wide analyses		

(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

ESG 2005 – Part 3		ESG 2015 – Part 3
3.1 Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education		3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance
3.2 Official status		3.2 Official status
3.3 Activities		3.3 Independence
3.4 Resources		3.4 Thematic analysis
3.5 Mission statement		3.5 Resources
3.6 Independence		3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct
3.7 External quality assurance criteria and processes		3.7 Cyclical external review of agencies
3.8 Accountability procedures		

(table: Achim Hopbach)

ESG 2005 → 2015



- 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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EQAR in practice



Registration based on external review of agency



Annual updates on reviews and countries



Substantive change reports



Third-party complaints



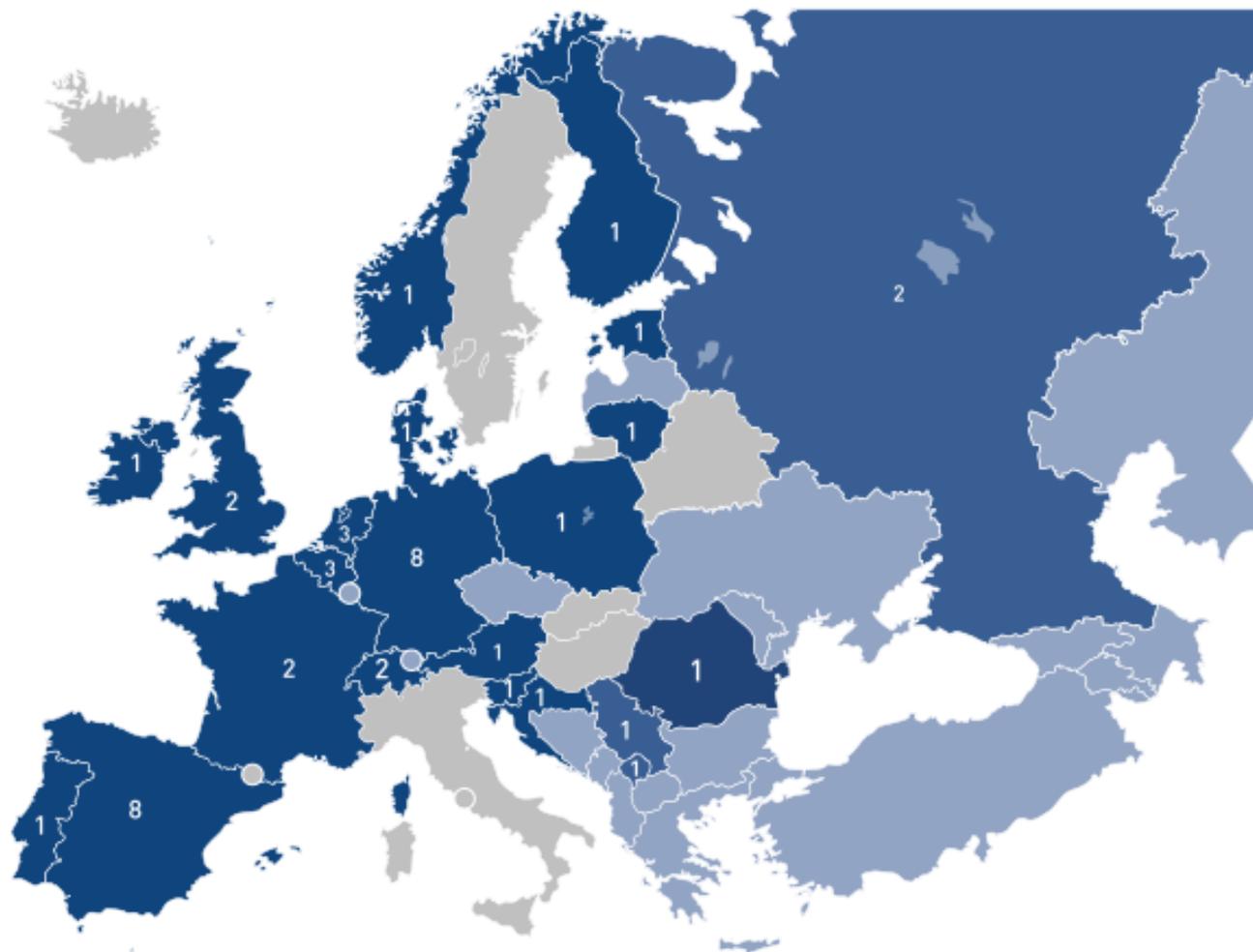
Periodic renewal every 5 years



EQAR-registered agencies



- 44 registered QAAs
- Governmental members without registered agency



EQAR – system information



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



Name	Based in*
University of Amsterdam	Netherlands
VU University Amsterdam	Netherlands
Amsterdamse Hogeschool voor de Kunsten	Netherlands
Hogeschool van Amsterdam	Netherlands
...	...

VU University of Amsterdam (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

Showing current details - click to include history

1. Basic information

Country: Netherlands
 Website: <http://vu.nl/nl/index.aspx>
 NQF 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)

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)

Status: Voluntary
 Formal decision: yes, positive with conditions or restrictions

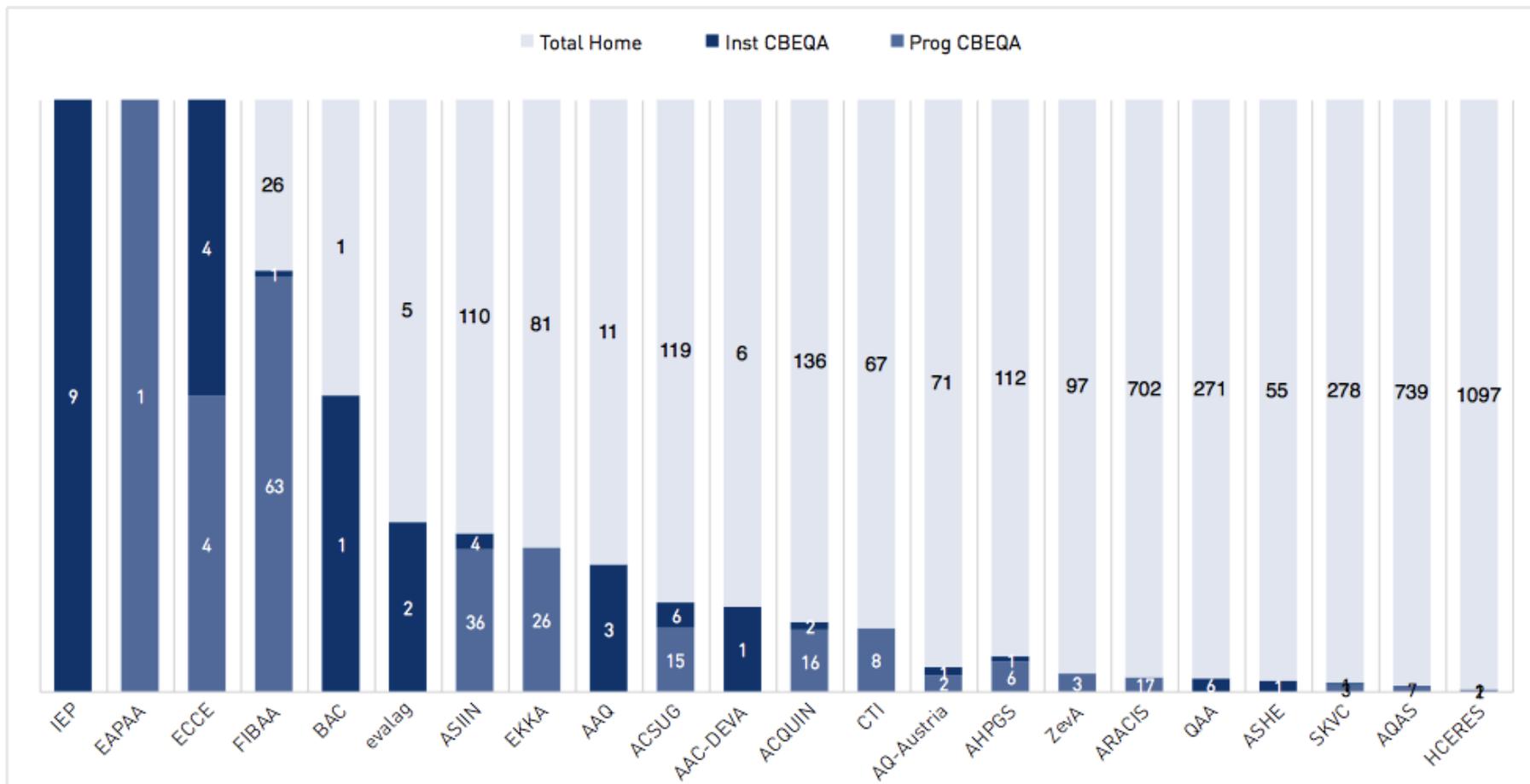
Public Administration (Accreditation by EAPAA)

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



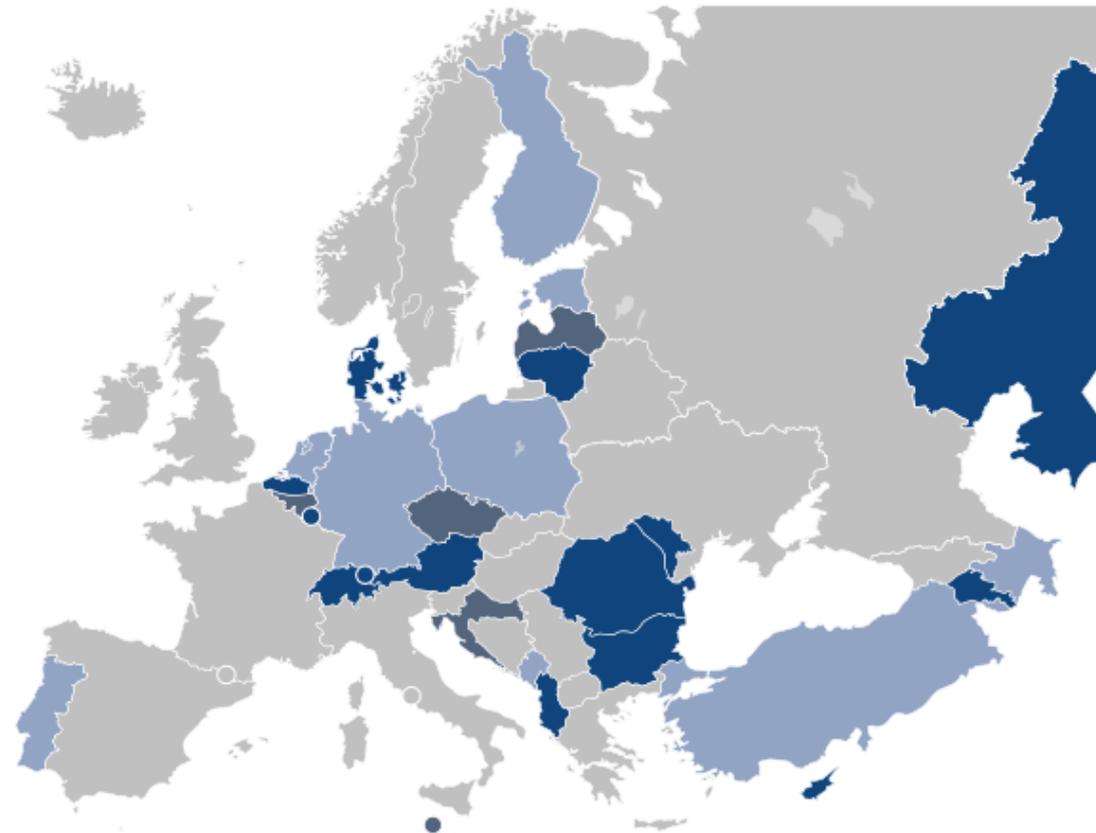
CBQA: opportunities & challenges



	Opportunities	Challenges
Higher Education Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• International visibility• Valuable feedback• Increased commitment• Different approaches• Suit their own mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify suitable agency• Workload and costs• Unknown expectations• Language
Quality Assurance Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• International profile• Experience relevant for work at home• Diversification	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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

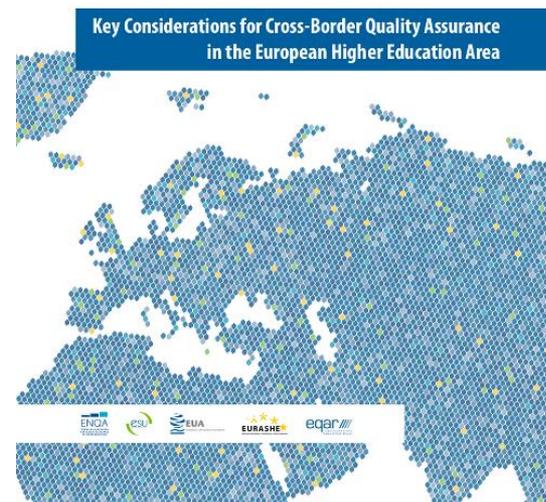
Rationale, suitable agency, legal framework, internal and external stakeholders

- 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

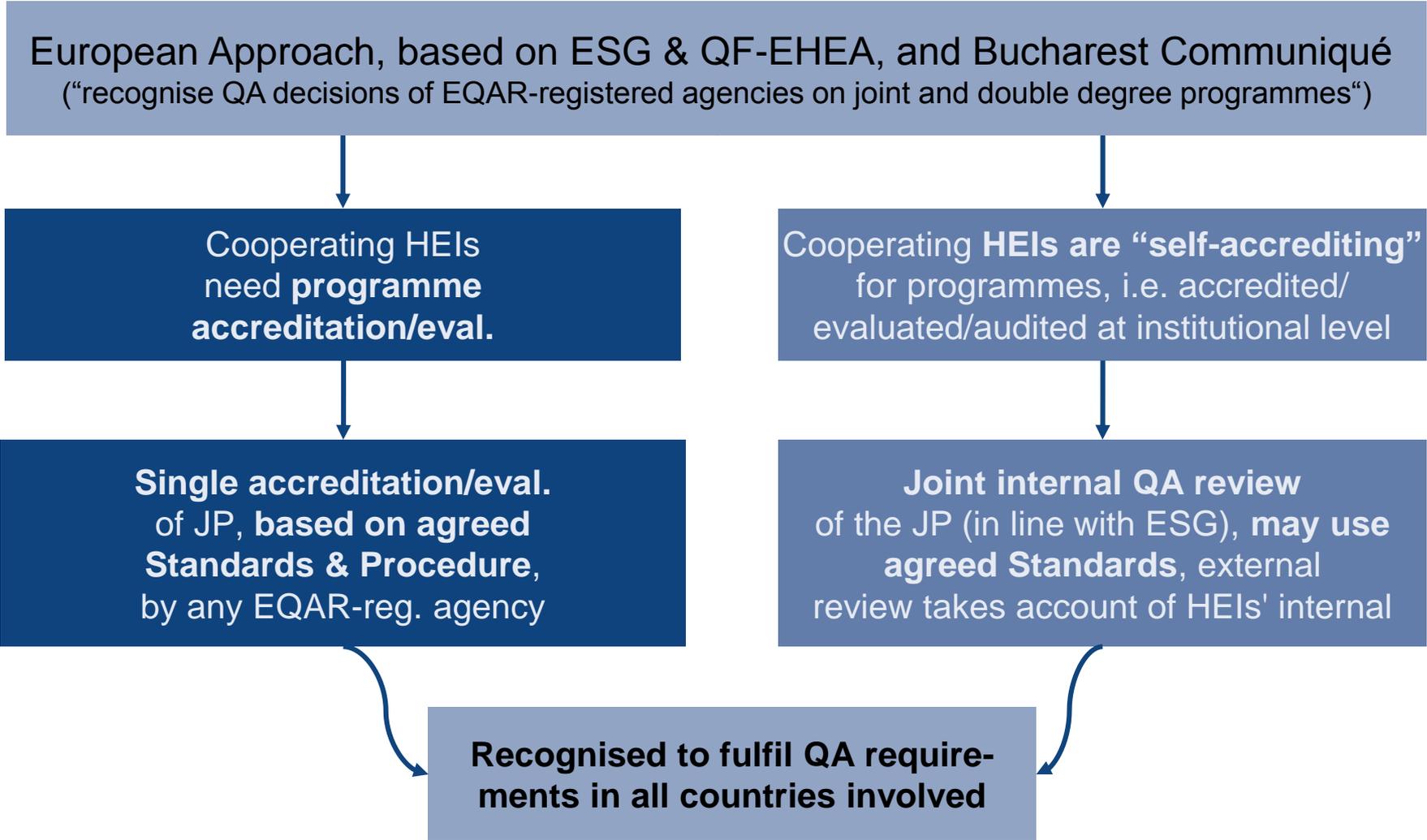
European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes



- **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



In a nutshell



Before	After
Multiple, fragmented reviews	Single review
Combining various national rules and criteria	Agreed Standards, based on ESG & QF-EHEA
Complex procedures, ad hoc design	Agreed Procedure

Availability of the European Approach

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All higher education institutions are able to use the European Approach to satisfy national QA requirements

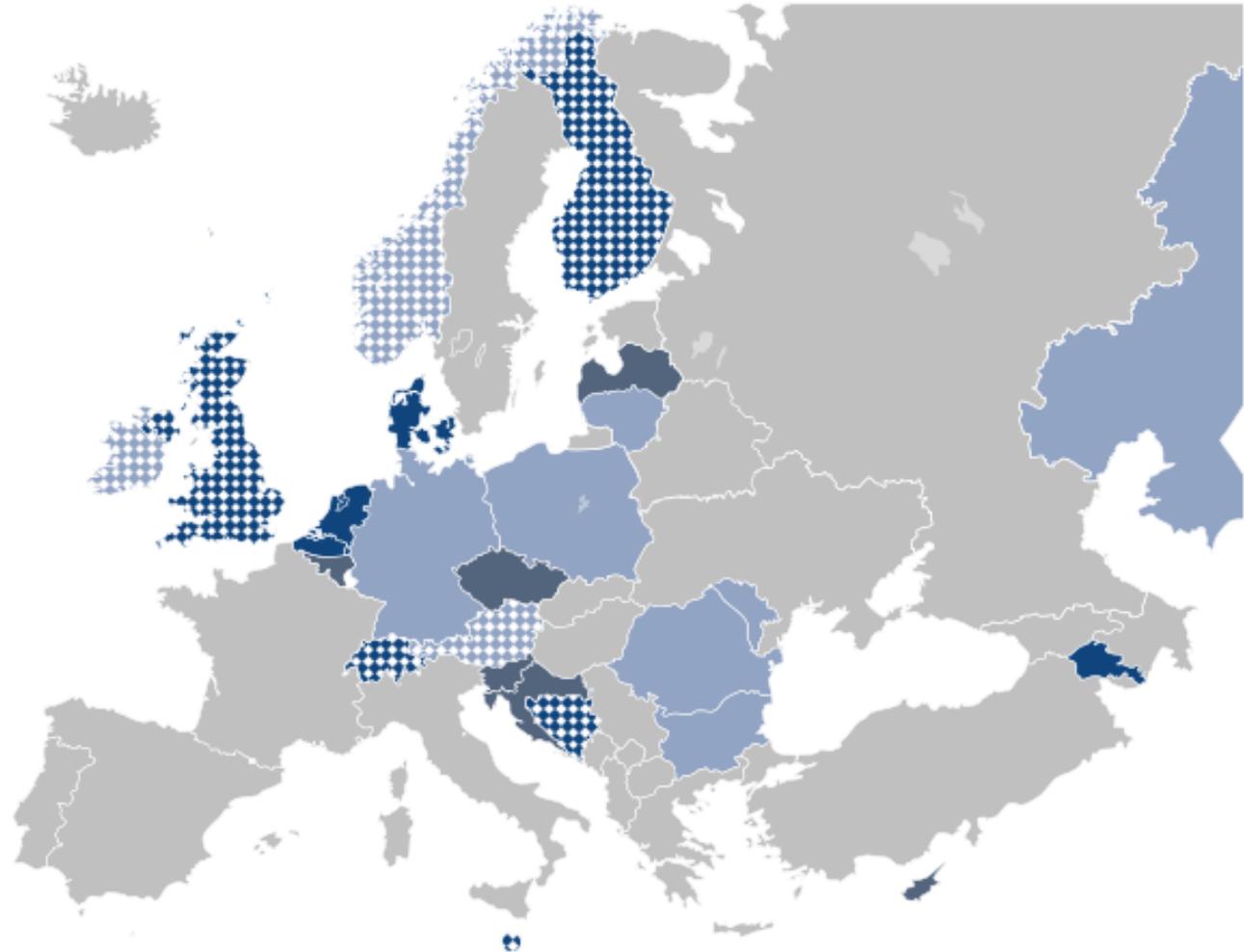
■ recognition of single external QA procedure for programmes

▤ 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...?

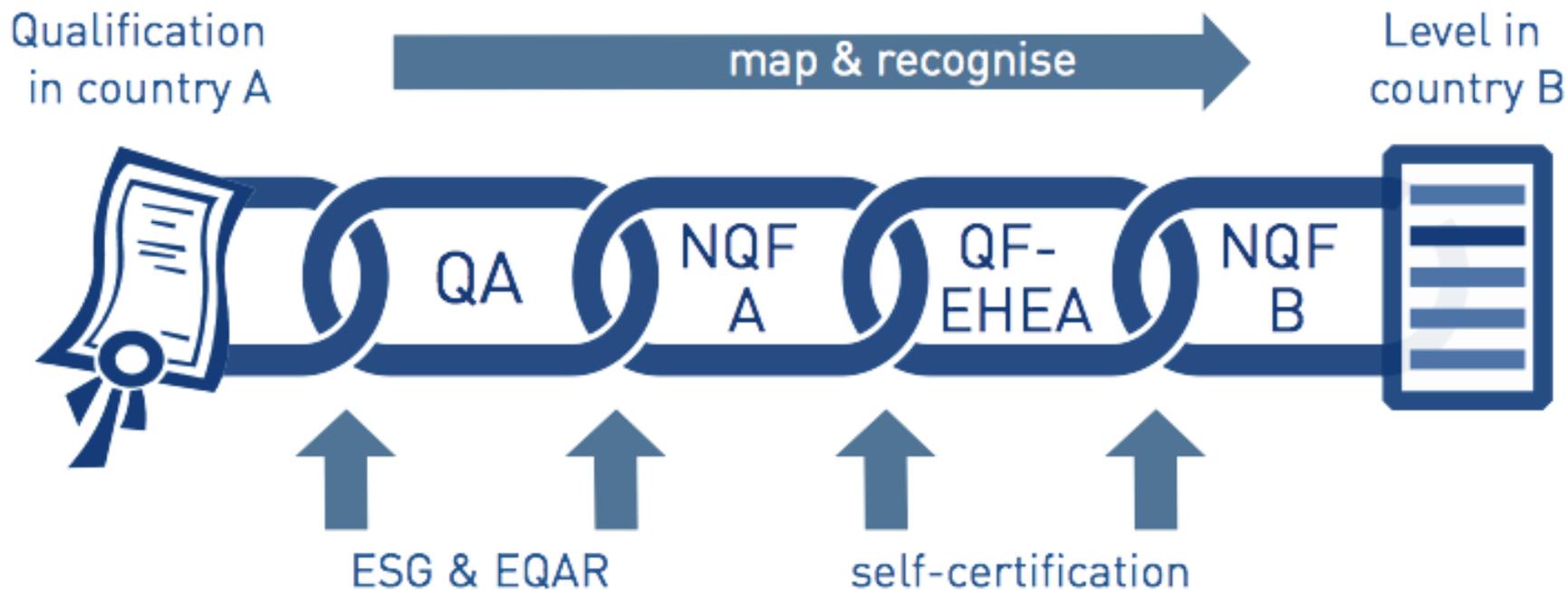
In practice: reflections



- 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

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Thank you for your attention!

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