EQuAM

Summary Report on the 2nd Matching Exercise
Rome: 28th Feb - 1st March 2013

Summary

The second of the two EQuAM Matching Exercise was held at the Sapienza University Rome on 28thth Feb – 1st March 2013. Its main purpose was identify the 'layers' of quality assurance requirements that impact on the Jordanian and European partner universities, and further to identify the drivers and priorities that have and will influence changes in their internal QA and responses to external QA. Building on the QA arrangements described by European universities in Barcelona, three further examples were used to illustrate the diversity of QA expectations and procedural requirements that apply to universities in Catalunya, Wales, where the demands of 'national / regional agendas' are dealt with in markedly contrasting ways, and in Italy where institutions are coming under a new external QA regime. The Jordanian partner universities identified the changes in external QA expectations and arrangements during the past 3 years and projections for the next 3 years, and institutional priorities that had resulted in the actions they had taken and were planning in terms of changing internal QA arrangements. This information was intended to provide an indication of the range of external QA 'layers' that universities need to respond to, and their priorities in planning and developing their QA arrangements.

The first day in Rome further illustrated the diversity of QA approaches applied to and taken by European universities, and the different contexts and priorities within the Jordanian universities. The diversity of European approaches indicated what is, in action, a European approach based essentially on 'principles and guidelines'. Further in focusing on part 1 of the ESG the QA systems described are focus primarily on 'teaching and learning' and, to some extent, on 'the student experience'.

In summarising the outcomes of the first day it started to become apparent that, in addition to the more obvious notions of interactions between external and internal 'layers' (national and regional political agendas, their impacts on QA expectations and actions), the ways in which institution's mission, vision, context and, importantly, leadership influence the priorities in dealing with changing requirements. In this regard it will be important to ensure that the full survey of all Jordanian HEIs concerning the roles, expectations and development of QBs will need to be planned and organised carefully.

The second day focussed on the current and potential roles of 'quality bureaus/offices/etc' within institutions and the ways in which their management and roles vary. Following consistent comments in both the Barcelona and Rome exercises particular focus was also paid to the involvement (or lack of) of academic staff within the formal / explicit demonstration of internal QA. It became apparent that there may be some 'tensions' between the ways in which the ESG and HEAC standards are presented and the wish to get greater and more enthusiastic engagement of teaching academics with formal IQA processes (often regarded as an unnecessary burden by those involved in teaching).

Background (to the Rome Matching Exercise)

The primary purpose of the second EQuAM Matching Exercise was for the European and Jordanian university partners to consider the extents to which they are involved in different 'layers' of External QA (EQA) and the ways in which they prioritise their Internal QA (IQA) to meet the various demands / expectations. Further, since there is continuous change in the demands/expectations of EQA they were asked to consider to what extent and how their priorities had changed in the recent past and how they might change in the foreseeable future.

The programme for the Rome meeting was designed to provide, in addition to an introduction to the new Italian EQA system, initial results and reflections on the multi-layered EQA to which European HEIs are subject (in Spain and the UK, 'national' and 'regional' differences, as well as the requirements for separate accreditation of programmes that lead to a 'licence to practice' (e.g. medicine, engineering, architecture, etc), and the importance (or not) of 'quality labels' (ISO, ACCSB/EQUIS,

ABET, European labels etc). The Jordanian universities considered their responses to the changing national demands with the development of the HEAC Standards, and the relative importance of regional rankings and international 'labels' (ABET etc).

Participants at the Rome Matching Exercise

Included 4 Jordanian and 4 European universities, the quality assurance agencies for Jordan, Spain and Catalunya, the Jordanian Ministry covering higher education, and staff from the co-ordinating organiser OBREAL / University of Rome.

The 'results' presented at the Rome Matching Exercise

It is important to note that, because of the development nature of the project, it was agreed that whilst participating partners would within the ('closed') meetings be 'open and honest' about the current state and planned developments of their QA systems, and their effectiveness. To assist in this it was agreed that any results reported to the meeting, and views expressed within it, would only be reported anonymously to any 'externally' audiences (unless partners explicitly agreed otherwise – perhaps at a later stage).

The new EQA approach for Italian HE was presented from both the general principles and perspectives and also from the technical perspective of the considerable IT infrastructure that had been developed to support it – and provide public information and 'transparency' in due course. The system differed from some in Europe in that it was proposed that it would have an impact on the funding not just of research (common across Europe that EQA affects research funding priorities and levels) but also in the distribution of funds for teaching and learning.

The Jordanian universities made presentations based on the survey they had completed. A general comment from all was that the approach of the survey was not readily 'translatable' to the Jordanian context (the 'weighting' of priorities in determining strategic developments/decisions within institutions) and that care would need to be taken in designing the survey for the Ma'am meeting in May/June. That aside, the Jordanian university partners presented somewhat different results at an individual level although, unsurprisingly, all noted the importance of the introduction of the HEAC Standards and expectations. The extent to which these fitted within the 'layers' of EQA differed slightly depending on the mission of the institution and the level of 'maturity' (in terms of development of IQA) and – importantly – resources. Interesting none placed a high priority on 'regional' aspects of EQA (in marked contrast to the European partners, although for them 'regional' has two different meaning (see below).

A detailed analysis of and commentary on the results presented by the Jordanian universities in Barcelona and in Rome will be included within the Jordanian meeting (May/June).

The emphasis of the presentation from the European partners was rather different. For them the 'regional' aspects of EQA are important (and by implication seen as increasingly important). However 'regional' can be considered under two quite different heading .. regional as 'sub-national' and as 'supra-national'.

For Spain ('represented' in this context by the University of Barcelona) there were the EQA expectations at a national level (through ANECA) *and* at the 'regional' (Catalunya) level through AQU, with both agencies present within the project consortium. In the case of Spain the national and agencies of the autonomous regions utilise essentially the same procedures, although in the absence of any national base criteria such as a qualifications framework or subject/discipline descriptors. By contrast, the UK example demonstrated that, whether in England or under the devolved administrations of Scotland Wales or Northern Ireland, ALL universities were subject to the same underlying criteria (QF, benchmark statements, information requirements and a UK-wide Code of Practice for the management of QA within HEIs). The QA procedures, however, varied in their details – and, perhaps more importantly, in their underlying 'philosophy' (a former director of the English funding council summed up the difference as ''in England QA *before* QE (enhancement)'' – Scotland and Wales emphasise the enhancement aspect).

In both the Spanish and UK cases where there are 'regional' aspects at the 'sub-national/UK' level there are also important 'regional' considerations at the supra-national level. All of the external QA agencies are committed to the European Standards and Guidelines and these are reflected in their activities and those they expect of HEIs and their IQA systems. The ESG expectations are primarily focussed on teaching and learning and its quality assurance, although there are requirements concerned with legitimacy and governance.

The meeting was reminded however (from the Barcelona presentations) that the University of Montpelier had a primary focus an IQA approach that focussed on the whole institution (and was directed primarily towards the expectations of ISO rather than the ESG, and thus a focus of IQA on ALL aspects of the institutions activities. Similarly, although with a devolved system of responsibilities for QA, the University of Tallinn was also committed to a 'whole institution' approach.

Initial conclusions

With regard to the **European partner universities**: the 'Italian' model, as represented by the University of Sapienza confirmed that generally developed in Barcelona, with the universities and their EAQ agencies working within a (more or less structured) series of 'expectations' – that can be visualised as a series of 'layers' – predominantly generic-national and (international) subject/discipline, but also with European 'regional' expectations, set predominantly by the Bologna Process. There are however a variety of governance / management models demonstrated across different HEIs, although the QA priorities are relatively stable.

(for EQA/IQA it is clear that an institution's overall strategy to its external evaluation, and the leadership/managerial context have a significant effect on what approach(es) an institution takes towards internal quality assurance. Interestingly two of the European HEIs present at the Barcelona Matching Exercise had taken a 'whole institution/total quality management' approach to quality assurance, focusing on either an EQFM derived system or the requirements of meeting ISO as the primary target for external QA.

With regard to the **Jordanian partner universities**: the Barcelona conclusions, that the widely different missions and resources of the universities, and their different stages of development, both as institutions as a whole, impacted on their internal QA systems. What was increasingly apparent from the Rome matching exercise was that, by contrast the rather more complex but perhaps more stable context in which European universities operate their IQA, the Jordanian partners were in process of not only developing but having to meet changing contexts and demands/priorities at the same time. **This places increasing emphasis on achieving a clear analysis of the relationship(s) between the expectations and responsibilities placed upon QBs by their Jordanian universities and their authorities and management / governance. These aspects will be examined in detail at the meeting in Jordan in May.**

The discussions also further reiterated and focussed attention on two key aspects:
- the similarities in the underlying principles between the ESG and HEAC Standards, but their significantly different forms of expression related to their different (but also overlapping) roles
- the difficulties of ensuring more widespread engagement by the majority of academic staff with the increasing needs for explicit and transparent IQA within universities (whilst recognising that the substantial majority of academics are committed, as they would see it to 'quality', but in 'their way' i.e. implicit and with no great priority for 'transparency'.

The former is subject to continuing comparative analysis, whilst the latter led to a broader discussion about the nature of QA requirements and their 'presentation' and whether this was suited to attract engagement by academics.

A summary analysis (see file EQuAM Rome 3) of the ways in which the ESG and HEAC Standards are presented a 'stark' image, both of the differences between the ESG and the HEAC Standards and, perhaps, an underlying reason why they are not an inducement to encourage academics to be more engaged in 'explicit and transparent' IQA. Each of the main Standards was considered and 'colour coded' according to the responsible audience it addressed (yellow for institutional management, blue

for academics, and green where there joint responsibilities / actions were required). A comparison of the main HEAC Standards and ESG Part 2 (for EQA of HEIs and their IQA) showed that for the 12 HEAC Standards 6 were regarded as 'yellow' and 6 'green' with nothing left to the sole responsibility of the academics. Of the 7 ESG two were colour coded yellow, 4 green and one (assessment of students) blue.

Two aspects are immediately apparent from this simple analysis
- the wider range of HEAC Standard roles (the comparable ESG do not really consider the requirements for establishment / governance of an HEI but rather just the IQA of an existing institution)
- the overt emphasis placed on institutional / management responsibilities as opposed to academic responsibilities.

A subsequent 'colour coding' of the details of the ESG and HEAC Standards (see files EQuAM Rome 4 and 5) reinforced the points above, confirming the differences in scope and emphasis between the ESG and HEAC, and providing further evidence, perhaps, of why academics might tend to feel 'excluded' from the development / application of IQA where the emphasis is over-whelming directed towards institutional management priorities.

As an initial proposal for examining the different roles/responsibilities for IQA within an institution, and seeking greater engagement of academics a matrix was proposed (see file EQuAM Rome 6) in which responsibilities would be 'graded' on the bases of two axes:
- administrative – academic
- quantitative – qualitative

With the notion that the responsibility (and authorities!) for IQA concerned with academic / qualitative should reside with academics whilst those for administrative / quantitative would reside more with institutional 'management'.

Next steps
.. pretty much listed above .. but also depending on your reactions to the draft stuff above ..