

Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area

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ENQA at a glance

Umbrella NGO for European QA agencies in HE, founded in 2000

Membership:

- 49 members (7 of which candidate)
- 42 affiliates

Membership criteria by and large: “Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area” (ESG)

ENQA at a glance -2

Purpose:

- **as a membership organisation, to represent its members** at the European level in political decision making processes;
- **to function as a think tank** for developing further quality assurance in the EHEA;
- **to function as a communication platform** for sharing and disseminating information and expertise in quality assurance

ENQA and the Bologna Process

- Quality Assurance as one pillar of EHEA since the beginning in 1999
- ENQA consultative member of the Bologna Follow-up Group
- Huge developments in European QA in the last 10 years!

Main contributions:

- Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European higher Education Area (ESG), adopted in 2005; drafted by ENQA together with EUA, EURASHE and ESU (“E4”);
- The “European Quality Assurance Register”, founded by E4 in 2008;
- Addressing relevant issues of quality assurance and feeding the results into discussions at the European level;
- Sharing good practice, fostering cooperation.

European Standards and Guidelines

- Adopted in 2005
- **Common standards**, “designed to be applicable to all higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies in Europe, irrespective of their structure, function and size, and the national system in which they are located” → **generic principles**
- Give the basis for a **common understanding** of QA and what it stands for at the European level
- Support **creation of trust** between agencies (know they draw on the same standards) and institutions and thus facilitates international cooperation and mobility
- Include standards for internal QA, external QA and standards QA agencies
- Prepared by **stakeholders**, which is very important (not by governments): EUA, ENQA, EURASHE and ESU. All key actors in European QA!
- Now revision, after several years, but no revolution is expected, mainly clarification and consistency

ESG cover all types of quality assurance procedures:

- Evaluation: enhancement oriented, focusing on strengths and weaknesses of a programme, resulting in recommendations for improvement
- Accreditation: evaluation whether a programme/an institution meets a certain standard, leading to a yes/no decision

ESG cover all types of agencies:

- Agencies working in all subject fields/with all types of HEI
- Agencies that have specialised in a certain field
- Based on and reflect some main principles for QA in Europe

Current trends

„National external quality assurance regimes and the agencies as main actors are in compliance with ESG.“

(Lower level of compliance is in most cases due to national legislation)

The most common external quality assurance procedures are **accreditation and evaluation of programmes**, followed at a significant distance by evaluation and accreditation of institutions, and by audits.

90% of agencies apply more than one approach

75% of agencies changed or are in the process of changing their approach

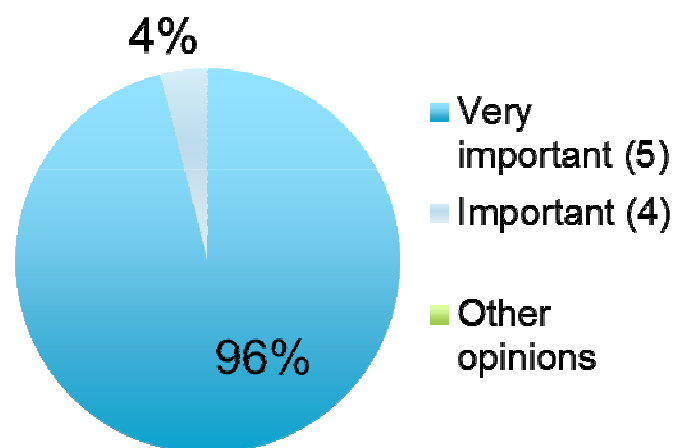
- Maybe trend towards audits/institutional evaluation is visible
- Intensifying **monitoring and follow-up through data and indicators** (measuring impact is a hot question!)
- Increasing importance of **identifying excellence** (attractiveness of HE and promotion of innovation)

Variety and steady change are key features of external QA in the EHEA!

(Stocktaking report 2009; External evaluation of the Bologna process 2010, ENQA survey of agency reviews)

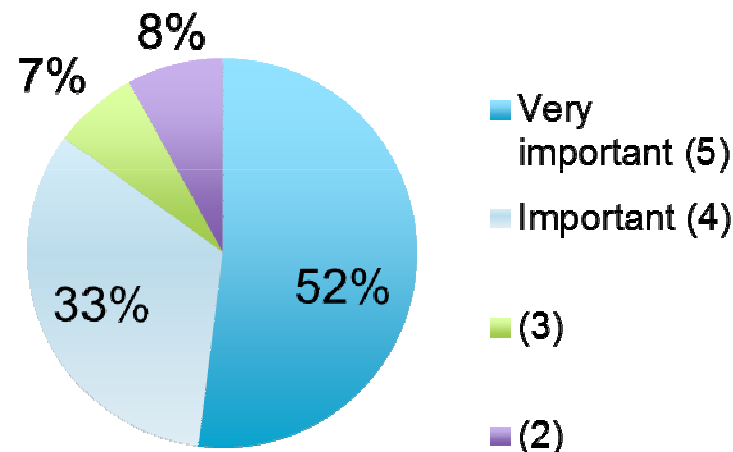
ENQA survey of agencies - Main priorities

Enhancement as a priority
(% of agencies)



QAAs promote the QA systems managed by the HEIs and review externally their effectiveness in bringing about enhancement.

Public information as a priority
(% of agencies)



To encourage comparability in external review processes and to foster the introduction of system wide enhancements.

European challenges

- 47 countries, at least 49 systems → creation of common standards a major challenge
- No one and only interpretation of the ESG and some gaps in understanding them at different levels
- Practical implementation in different contexts
- Resistance to QA: control or support for development?
- Low degree of comparability of reports → need better, more consistent, and userfriendly information (skip the „obscure language“) → EQArep
- Addressing accreditation of joint programmes
- Low degree of acknowledgement of QA decision between European countries/agencies

Conclusions

- **Diversity** in developing solutions and strategies (according national regulations)
- Diversity is compatible with **enhancement** oriented approaches: enhancement a priority to almost all QA agencies
- Increased focus on **institutional QA**
- Agencies are open to **involve stakeholders** (by now a “must”)
- **International dimension** is increasingly expected (experts)
- Improvement of information and communication
- Agencies’ scope of activity has broadened (consultancy → enhancement)
- **National regulations** still driving the majority of QA agencies’ activities

Is there a „European Quality Assurance System‘?

Do convergence of approaches, international participation, international co-operation, rising level of mutual trust form a ‚system‘?

Note: There are no binding legal structures and national agendas matter!

Maybe rather a European Quality Assurance *Area* than a ‚System‘

QA needs to find ways to:

- be responsive to diverse demands
- clarify the purpose of quality assurance (and convince others about it)
- ensure that the processes are fit for purpose (not for their own sake)
- to create quality culture



Thank you!

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