



Centralised Support to the Network of Higher Education Reform Experts (HERE)

HERE Seminar:

**Towards the 2024 Tirana Ministerial Conference:
Implications and points of interest for higher education systems in Partner Countries neighbouring the EU**

7-8 November 2023

Background information on: Quality Assurance and the EHEA



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to the Network
of Higher Education
Reform Experts



A short history

- A main focal point of the BP since its inception (1999) has been quality assurance in higher education, especially in developing comparable criteria and methodologies
- This was intended to bolster the quality of higher education delivery, and **set a common framework** for quality assurance systems for learning and teaching at European, national and institutional level;
- **the assurance and improvement of quality** of higher education in the European higher education area were and continue to be dually important
- **Intention to support mutual trust**, thus facilitating recognition and mobility within and across national borders;
- And **provide information on quality assurance** in the EHEA.

- ## Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)

by
European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
European Students' Union
European University Association
European Association of Institutions in Higher Education
Education International
BUSINESSEUROPE
European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education

The ESG: Principles

- The ESG 2015 are based on four principles:
 - 1) that the primary responsibility lies with higher education institutions for the quality and quality assurance of their provision;
 - 2) that quality assurance needs to respond to the diversity of higher education systems, institutions, programmes, and students;
 - 3) that quality assurance needs to support the creation of a quality culture;
 - and 4) that quality assurance takes into account the needs and expectations of students, other stakeholders, and the society.
- *The ESG do not prescribe in detail what quality is, nor do they prescribe how quality assurance processes should be implemented. Rather, they maintain their role in **providing guidance** and indicating areas that are vital for quality provision of higher education.*

ESG 2005 vs. 2015

- The EQUIP project has published a [Comparative analysis of the ESG 2015 and ESG 2005](#) which summarises the key differences, such as
 - the greater emphasis in diversity of QA systems in Europe
 - the importance of embedding QA in strategic management
 - that all programmes should be referenced to a national qualifications framework.
 - Generally greater clarity in the new standards and guidelines (but a light revision)



Stakeholder engagement and take-up

- The ESG were both developed and widely promoted by stakeholder organisation, like EUA, ENQA, EURASHE and ESU
- The European Commission has funded many cooperation projects within the EHEA and beyond to promote their application.
- They have helped to generate a culture of quality in HEI as well as a greater trust between HEI and national agencies that may externally assess and in some instances accredit them and their programmes.

A Register of QA Agencies

The European Quality Assurance Register – was established in 2007, as an official listing of QA agencies that comply with the ESG (and have been subject to an external review).

It now also houses DEQAR, a database of programmes and HEI that have been subject to review by registered agencies.

<https://www.eqar.eu/register/agencies/>



Did you know?

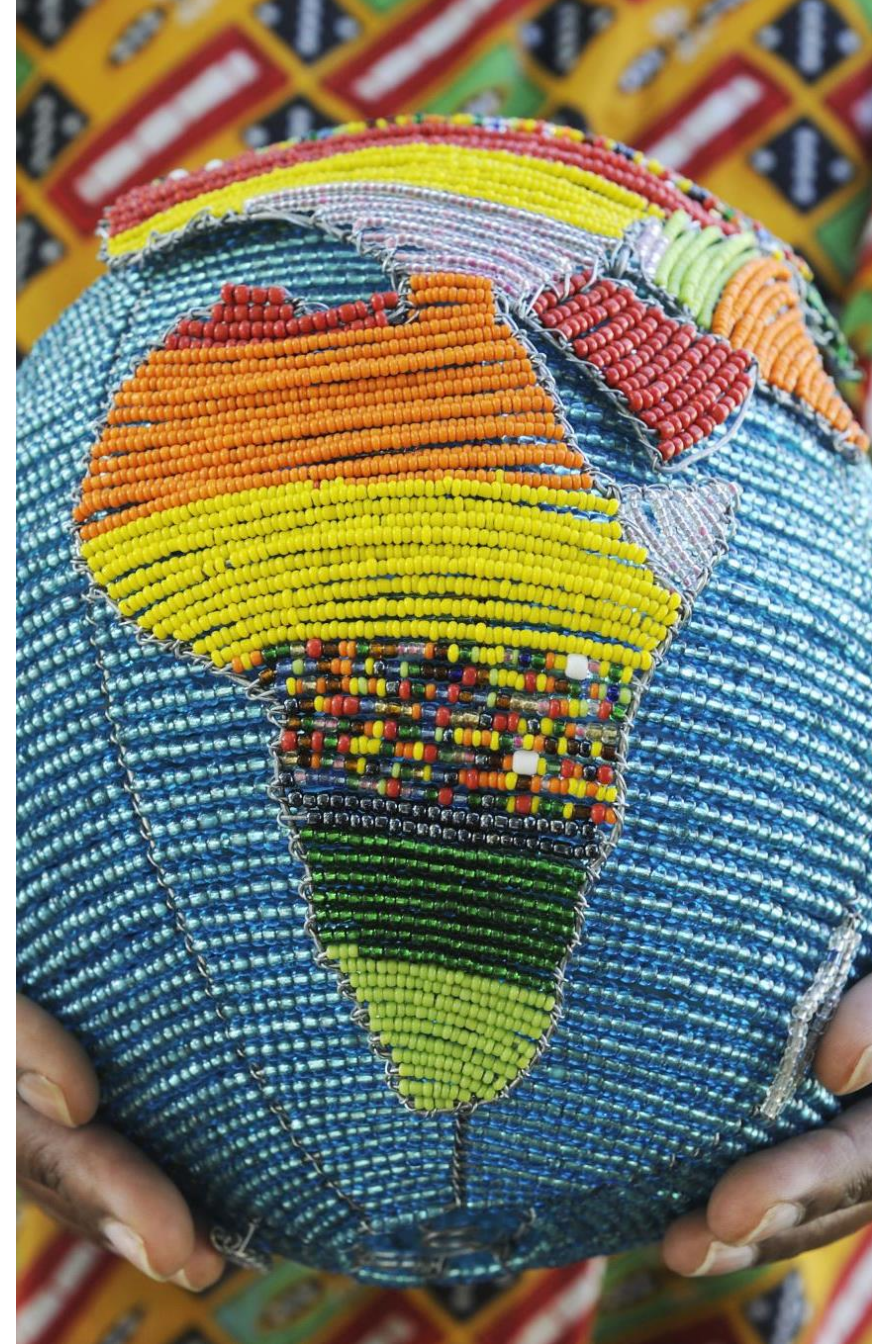
- As a unique feature of Bologna, key stakeholders, called the 'E4' are all members of the process (EUA, EURASHE, ESU and ENQA) and proposed the first and second version of the ESG to ministers to be approved (ministers tasked them to do this). This shows the critical bottom-up/ top-down nature of Bologna, and its inherent stakeholder inclusiveness
- 57 agencies are (voluntarily) registered in EQAR, but this does not cover all countries in the EHEA (and some countries do not have agencies). Georgia and Kazakhstan are two HERE countries that have registered agencies.
- In the EHEA, QA agencies should in theory recognise the QA decisions of other registered agencies. In addition, HEI in some countries are legally allowed to be assessed by an agency that is in the EQAR, which is not their national agency. This happens seldom.
- Ministers have also adopted a European Approach to Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes

Global Impacts

- The ESG and the Quality Assurance alignment in the Bologna Process have inspired other world regions, which have also been the target of EU cooperation for development and numerous capacity building projects under the former Tempus Programme, Alfa Programme and what is now Erasmus+
- Examples include the ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework and the African Standards and Guidelines for QA (ASG-QA).
- Developments in other regions have also inspired the EHEA – The mention of NQFs in regional standards and guidelines emanated in ASEAN, for example.

Global Impacts

- Each has its own distinct political integration framework and dynamics, but many similarities are shared with QA in the EHEA, in particular the three-part approach to standards and guidelines
- Two points of discussion in the African context, for example, are whether separate guidelines for open and online learning are needed in a post-covid context and also whether specific standards and procedures for the assessment of doctoral studies and research would be an advantage.





What is new with QA in
Bologna?

Rome Communiqué 2020

- *“We acknowledge the progress made in the development of quality assurance systems aligned with the ESG, and we commit to removing the remaining obstacles, including those related to the **cross-border operation of EQAR registered agencies** and the application of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.*
- *We commit to ensuring that our external quality assurance arrangements cover **transnational higher education in the EHEA** with equal standards as for domestic provision.*
- *In view of the need for increased flexibility and openness of learning paths, smaller units of learning and greater synergies among higher education institutions, we encourage an **enhancement-oriented use of the ESG** to support innovation in higher education and its quality assurance.”*

QA and Micro-credentials

- This emergent topic in Europe initially was a source of worry for some, especially as regarding to quality assurance. Micro-credentials were addressed by the Bologna Process in Rome Communiqué (2020) as a possible conduit for **flexible learning pathways**
- A survey conducted by ENQA in 2021 for the MICROBOL project found that all QA agencies that answered felt the ESG Part 1 (IQA) and Part 2 (EQA) were a solid basis for quality assurance of micro-credentials: <https://www.enqa.eu/publications/approaches-to-quality-assurance-of-micro-credentials/>
- Most agencies in Europe have decided **not to evaluate micro-credentials** separately, primarily because this would require a lot of human and other resources, but also because HEIs have been through several rounds of institutional and programme level evaluations.
- The MICROBOL project recommended that programme level evaluation should not be encouraged for each micro-credential, as it is too elaborate for such small volumes of learning (MICROBOL, 2021a, p. 4).
- Studies have been done to scan approaches to QA in Micro-credentials across the EHEA: <https://www.enqa.eu/publications/approaches-to-quality-assurance-of-micro-credentials/>

European University Alliances

- A Flagship of the European strategy for universities and the European Education Area, these strategic alliances have received considerable seed-funding from the EU
- They can be seen as a litmus test for QA in the EHEA (as well as credits, recognition, etc), as the alliances require a deeper integration of study programmes and research, which requires common governance and QA approaches
- They are seen as a test ground for also exploring a joint European degree



A decorative graphic on the left side of the slide. It features two concentric circles, the outer one in a light blue-grey and the inner one in a light green. In the center of these circles are two blue arrows. One arrow points diagonally up and to the right, while the other points diagonally down and to the right, creating a sense of movement or a cycle.

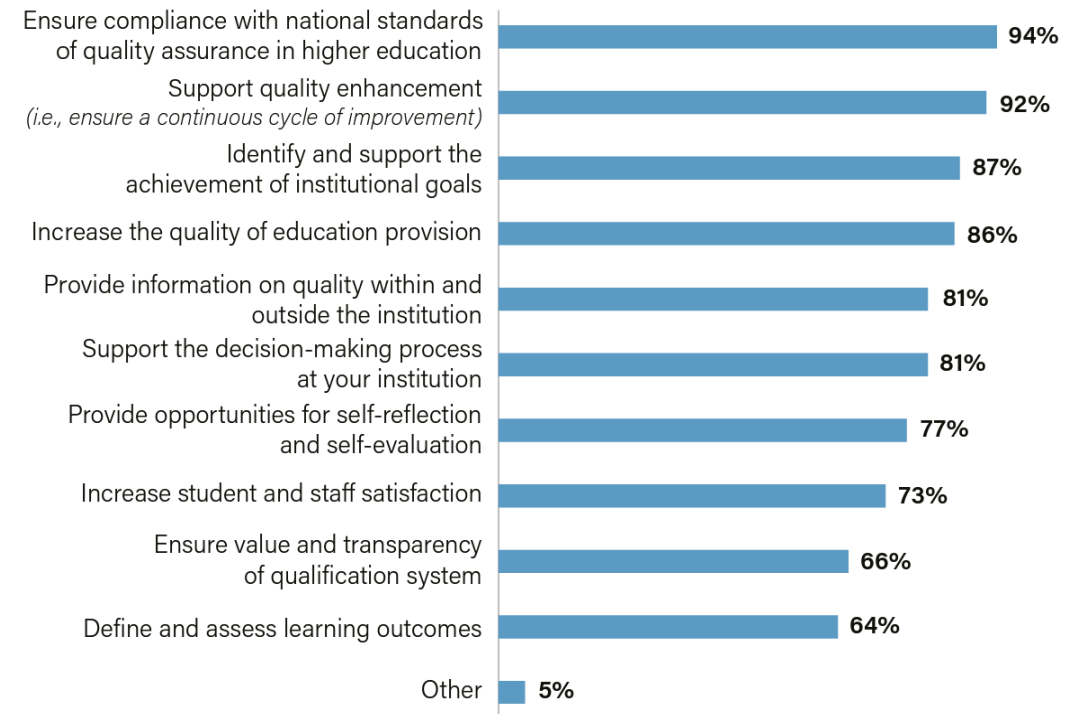
Revision of the ESG

- The ESG are up for revision again.
- However, in celebration of almost 20 years of this important tool, the changes will be light, showing how robust it has been, especially in generating QA Culture

Primary role of Internal QA

- Results from the QA Fit Project, currently underway
- Shows the survey data from 260 responses across 41 countries


Figure 3: Primary role of internal QA





Questions

- How relevant are the BP discussions/approach on this topic to your context? Does it address the main challenges of your system?
- For those countries where the ESG is not implemented, do you see a need for such an instrument? Do you use the ESG? Or a different instrument?
- How does the ESG serve in relation to institutional vs programme accreditation approaches?
- What are the current-day challenges of ESG implementation (or in general QA for those countries who do not comply with ESG)?



Reference material

European University Alliances: <https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/european-universities-initiative/about?>

ESG:

chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/2015_Yerevan/72/7/European_Standards_and_Guidelines_for_Quality_Assurance_in_the_EHEA_2015_MC_613727.pdf

Rome Communique: chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.ehea.info/Upload/Rome_Ministerial_Communique.pdf

EQUIP report:

chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/EQUIP_comparative-analysis-ESG-2015-ESG-2005.pdf

European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes: <https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/>

Approaches to QA of Micro-credentials: <https://www.enqa.eu/publications/approaches-to-quality-assurance-of-micro-credentials/>

QA FIT

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