

# **QA in HE: The European Framework**

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# Functions of QA in the EHEA

## To ensure an «adequate», «acceptable» level of «quality»

- to generate trust, to inform and protect students/families
- to ensure the quality of imported / exported HE
- « global » quality, not only academic quality: LOs? Relevance?
- qualifications/competencies, not just degrees/diplomas

## To show/demonstrate *where* quality is being provided

- certificate, accreditation or seal of quality from external agency
- attractiveness of national HEI and HE in other countries
- higher quality / excellence vs. «adequate» quality
- a programme / HEI's performance is more than LOs: efficiency?
- QA and accreditation are very different from rankings

# Functions of QA in the EHEA

## To support the move towards more compatibility and mobility

- access to studies and labour market throughout EU + abroad
- to ease recognition for the purpose of mobility within the EHEA
- compatibility, not uniformity
- comparable standards for QA/accreditation, but...
- how comparable is quality formulated in terms of LOs ?
- how to handle the diversity of systems, languages, HEI, etc.?

## To contribute to the *improvement* of quality and relevance

- internal QA systems of HEI, data for strategic HEI management
- improvement of LOs: issues with definition and assessment
- but only if the standards and the references are adequate
- and if the notion of «quality» is more global than just academic quality and refers also to relevance and to efficiency

# 12 years of QA development in the EHEA

## Stage 1: a boom of initiatives and agencies

- QA/accreditation for all types of « quality »
- all types of agencies: +/- local, strong, open, specialised, etc.
- all types of processes (evaluation/audit, quality assurance, accreditation)
- differences in scope/focus (HEI, programmes, internal QA system; + research?)

## Stage 2: towards more coherence and compatibility (not uniformity)

- outline of EHEA system: quality rests with HEIs, internal QA is key  
EQF based on LOs (Tuning project)
- mutual recognition, not a mega Euro-agency for QA
- national agencies grouped in network(s), a few sectoral European agencies

## Stage 3: creation of common tools, search for credibility

- 2005: European Standards & Guidelines for QA; LOs emphasised (part 1)
- 2005: Code of Good Practice in Accreditation (ECA), EQF-EHEA
- 2006: EU Recommendation: Register, choice of agency by the HEIs  
first evaluations of agencies for their admission to ENQA
- 2007: first agreements on mutual recognition between ECA agencies
- 2008: start of EQAR, the « European Register» of (good?) agencies
- 2009-2012: EU Report on progress in QA in the EHEA + follow-up

# LO at the core of QA in the EHEA ?

## Implementation issues

- formulation of LOs: too generic or too detailed/numerous ?  
significant language issues
  - setting adequate LOs for particular courses: making adequate use of Tuning  
what is the right KSC mix?
  - tracing LOs with particular course items and learning methods
  - measuring LOs : student assessment in LOs remains an issue  
transfer credits for mobile students
  - QA procedures: ESGs, agencies procedures,  
LOs in HEIs' submissions for accreditation
- **sometimes more rhetoric than reality, superficial understanding of LOs**
- **vagueness has generated confusion, undue claims, reticence**
- **standardisation of LOs instead of contents (through legislation, QA)?**

# An impressive set-up, what impact on quality?

## Assessment of progress in QA in the EU (2009)

Many positive aspects, but: no obvious boom in quality/relevance/efficiency  
we are still far from a coherent European dimension in QA  
focus on LO, competencies, learners still difficult

## Most HEIs have set in place internal QA systems, with varying impact

- internal QA systems often lack institutional support and drive towards improvement
- the majority is geared towards formal and administrative aspects
- only few are really centred on learners and learning
- competency-based QA is making progress but remains difficult

## Many external QA/accreditation agencies, limited impact on improvement

- the ESGs are interpreted/applied in different ways in different countries/agencies
- they tend to be applied rather formally, automatically, with much bureaucracy:  
innovation, differentiation, higher quality are usually not explicitly valued
- ESGs not explicitly «European»: the requirements of the EHEA are not criteria
- the scope of QA/accreditation systems tends to exclude areas where they would be particularly needed (continuing education, TNE, distance HE, APEL)

# An impressive set-up, what impact on quality?

## Too many agencies, some with limited credibility and compatibility

- ESGs, part 3: evaluation of QA/accreditation agencies  
("substantial compliance", independence, authority, processes, resources)
- yet: critical mass? Trust? Credibility of quality seals?  
actual impact on quality, relevance, efficiency (is not a criterion)
- issues with "bureaucracy": trend away from minute programme accreditation
- joint curricula, joint/double degrees: how to handle them?
- quality seals/labels relevant to EHEA, e.g. internationalisation, mobility, ECTS

## Too few genuinely "European" agencies with strong international outreach

- a few specialised agencies with European scope:
  - EQUIS (management, higher quality seal, well established)
  - Eurobachelor/Euromaster in Chemistry (fully operational)
  - EUR-ACE (engineering, in pilot phase)
  - Music / conservatories, Informatics (in preparatory phase)
- high potential impact on quality improvement through comparison, emulation
- quality seals ("accreditation") easily legible and credible
- a future priority in the EHEA?

# Challenges for QA in the EHEA

## More attention to users' needs and legibility

- QA/accreditación is not questioned in its existence: is here to stay
- But it should be re-oriented:
  - **towards a more open, dynamic vision of «quality»:**  
more strategic, geared towards each HEI's profile  
more emphasis on quality improvement and innovation (curricula/pedagogy)
  - **towards its real purposes:**  
more geared towards learners and learning  
easier access for users, legibility, user-friendliness  
more focussed on LOs, programme performance, efficiency, regional impact  
more «profesional » processes (with fewer but better qualified actors)  
more inclusive of less traditional areas of HE/LLL
  - **towards a more systematic comparison between HEIs, countries, regions,**  
but keeping hands off from «rankings»



# Challenges for QA in the EHEA

## More attention to visibility and credibility outside EHEA

- QA in the EHEA is based on some common references and principles, with mostly national agencies and much room for national interpretations
- To the rest of the world, the system may still be difficult to read and use:
  - the « European dimension » of QA in the EHEA remains rather weak:
    - main EHEA tools (degree structure, credit structure) not yet generalised;
    - slow development of European-wide quality seals in specific areas
    - initiatives to foster areas/HEIs of « excellence » at national, not European level
- **Impact of rankings stronger than that of QA ?**
  - most rankings show serious methodological deficiencies and neglect key aspects of « quality » in HE: teaching-learning, LLL, access, social equity
  - yet, strong impact on HEIs and policy makers
  - search for « alternative » approaches to rankings, but slow progress with EU- Multirank and little attention the ranking of whole HE *systems*
- **Need to strengthen cooperation with countries/regions outside EHEA**
  - in QA: tools and methodology, use of outcomes
  - joint contribution of QA systems to improve information base for rankings

**Thank you for your attention**

**Merci de votre attention**

**شكرا لكم على اهتمامكم**

**Gracias por su atención**