

Higher education in Europe: current developments in quality assurance and accreditation

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outline

- The Bologna Process
- QA and accreditation in Europe
- ENQA
- The European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)
- The European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR)
- Europe's needs
- Some personal concerns
- Some other international developments

The Bologna Process

- Voluntary inter-governmental agreement involving 46 countries (+ the European Commission)
- Meant to create the 'European Higher Education Area' (EHEA) by 2010
- 10 action lines
- Objectives:
 - Student (and staff mobility)
 - Common basic structure for European HE (3 cycles- 'easily readable and comparable')
 - Common credit accumulation and transfer system
 - Promoting European cooperation in quality assurance
 - Promoting a European dimension in higher education
 - Promoting the attractiveness of the EHEA



Bologna: the leading actors

- National ministers of (Higher) Education
- European Commission;
- Bologna Follow-up Group –BFUG (ministry civil servants + ‘consultative members’)
- BFUG Board (a sub-set of BFUG)
- Consultative members:
 - ENQA; EUA;EURASHE; ESU; Council of Europe, UNESCO-CEPES; Business Europe (employers); Education International (education workers)
- BP Secretariat (itinerant)

The EHEA: points to note

- EHEA is ***not*** co-terminous with European Union
- EHEA is ***not*** a single European HE system or degree system
- EHEA is far from complete
- Bologna Process has helped to reform a number of national HE systems

Current QA activities in Europe

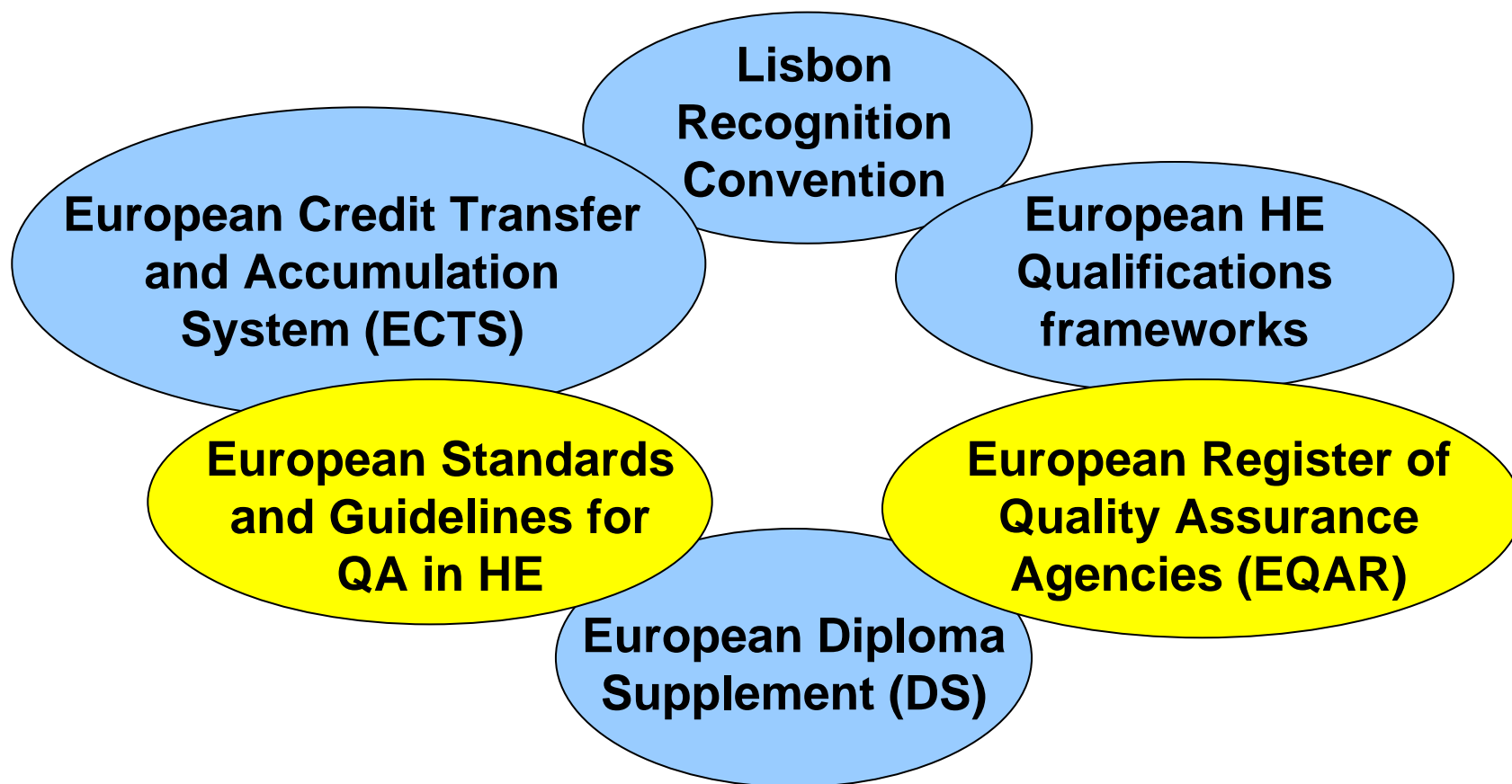
- Most countries now have quality assurance or accreditation agencies
- Mixture of programme accreditation, institutional accreditation, and non-accrediting external quality assurance reviews
- Some countries are moving/have moved from programme focus to institutional focus
- Some moving the other way
- Increasing use of European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)
- Some countries have incorporated ESG into national law

ENQA

- network founded in 2000; became an Association in 2004
- independent umbrella organisation for European quality assurance and accreditation agencies
- 37 Full members, 10 Candidate members
- ENQA membership requires external review and substantial compliance with ESG (cf. EQAR)
- external reviews of ENQA member agencies by 2010 to confirm Full membership
- associates and affiliates: 19+2
- structure: Board, General Assembly, Secretariat
- Based in Helsinki, Finland
- co-operation within 'E4' group (EUA, ESU, EURASHE)



The European HE Area: key quality-related instruments



European standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG)

- Commissioned by ministers in Berlin in 2003
- drafted by ENQA in consultation with EUA, EURASHE and ESIB (now ESU)
- approved by the Bologna ministerial conference in Bergen in 2005
- consist of
 - ESG for internal QA within HEIs (Part 1)
 - ESG for the external QA of higher education (Part 2)
 - ESG for external QA agencies (Part 3)

What are the 'standards'?

What are the 'guidelines'?

- 'Standards' in this context are not meant to imply 'standardisation' or 'requirements'
- 'standards' are statements of basic good practice; they are short and general
- 'Guidelines' are meant as illustrations of the standards in action; they provide additional information and explain why the standards are important

ESG Part 1: HEIs' internal quality assurance

- 1.1 Policy and procedures for quality assurance
- 1.2 Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards
- 1.3 Assessment of students
- 1.4 Quality assurance of teaching staff
- 1.5 Learning resources and student support
- 1.6 Information systems
- 1.7 Public information

ESG Part 2: external quality assurance

2.1 Use of internal quality assurance procedures

2.2 Development of external quality assurance processes

2.3 Criteria for decisions

2.4 Processes fit for purpose

2.5 Reporting

2.6 Follow-up procedures

2.7 Periodic reviews

2.8 System-wide analyses

ESG Part 3: external quality assurance agencies

- 3.1 Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education
- 3.2 Official status
- 3.3 Activities
- 3.4 Resources
- 3.5 Mission statement
- 3.6 Independence
- 3.7 External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies
- 3.8 Accountability procedures

What the ESG ARE

- Generic, not specific, standards and guidelines
- A view of what should be done, not how it should be done
- A source of assistance and guidance

What the ESG are NOT:

- Prescriptive
- A checklist
- A compendium of detailed procedures
- A European quality assurance system

The European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR)

- a publicly available, **web-based list of QA agencies** operating in Europe
- **voluntary**, entry through **compliance with ESG**, evidenced by an **external review**
- Managed through a new Brussels-based organisation
- information available at www.eqar.eu (first entries in Fall 2008)
- contains **basic information**, such as:
 - agency's name and contact information
 - QA services provided by the agency
 - Whether member of ENQA
 - country where the agency is established
 - countries in which the agency operates

EQAR's stated purposes

- promotes **student mobility** by providing a basis for the **increase of trust** among the HEIs;
- **reduces opportunities for 'accreditation mills'** to gain credibility;
- provides a basis for **governments to authorise HEIs to choose any agency from the Register**, if that is compatible with national arrangements;
- provides **a means for HEIs to choose between different agencies**, if that is compatible with national arrangements;
- serves as an instrument to improve the **quality of the quality assurance agencies** and to promote **mutual trust** among them.

The relationship between ENQA and EQAR

- **ENQA** is an umbrella **membership organisation** for European QA agencies which
 - organises events, publishes reports, shares and promotes good practice, conducts different (research) projects
 - represents the interests of its members in the EHEA and internationally
 - makes membership conditional on independently verified substantial compliance with ESG
 - publishes a list of its members on the internet
- **EQAR** will be an **information tool** about trustworthy QA agencies which
 - will not organise events, publish reports, share good practice or conduct (research) projects
 - also makes inclusion conditional on independently verified substantial compliance with ESG
 - will accept Full membership of ENQA as ‘prima facie’ evidence for inclusion in the Register
 - will also publish a list of its approved agencies on the internet

The Register - characteristics

- voluntary, self-financing, independent and transparent
- Applications to be evaluated on the basis of *substantial compliance* with the ESG, evidenced through an *independent review* process endorsed by national authorities, where this endorsement is required by those authorities
- Full membership of ENQA will be accepted as 'prima facie' evidence for inclusion in the Register

ENQA membership reviews

- Reviews normally undertaken by national authorities
- ENQA co-ordinates a small number each year
- Protocol published at <http://www.enqa.eu/files/National%20review%20guidelines.pdf>
- ENQA approves terms of reference and membership of review panels in advance
- ENQA scrutinises self-evaluation and report and judges level of compliance with ESG, and reliability of review process
- ENQA scrutiny process is intensive and extensive
- Membership test is 'substantial compliance'
- Full membership of ENQA lasts for 5 years, then further review required for re-confirmation

Europe's needs

- Strong internal quality cultures and associated actions
- External verification of quality
- Up to date information about quality
- Clearly understandable standards for QA
- A common language and vocabulary
- A continuing meaningful conversation between the key players (especially E4 members)

Personal concerns

- ESG are being given more weight than they were originally intended to bear
- QA becoming a political matter
- Too many QA agencies are fixated on processes and not on purposes
- Fitness for purpose is not the predominant driver of external QA processes at present
- Dangers of ossification
- There is a lot of information but limited communication in QA systems
- Compliance approaches may work against improvement
- Ready opportunities for self delusion

Some other international developments

Regional networks (selection):

- ENQA Europe
- CEEN Central & E Europe
- EAQAN E Europe & Central Asia
- APQN Asia Pacific
- AAAC Canada
- RIACES South America
- CANQATE Caribbean
- AfriQAN Africa
- ANQAHE Arab countries
- INQAAHE: Guidelines of Good Practice
 - ? ->list of agencies aligned with GGP
- OECD/UNESCO: Guidelines for quality provision in cross-border higher education