



Thematic Peer Group C on Quality Assurance

Second Meeting, Hosted by Belgium Flemish Community
17-18 May 2022
Venue: Irish College, KU Leuven, Belgium

Minutes

List of Participants

Country	Name	Last Name
Armenia	Varduhi	Gyulazyan
Azerbaijan	Ilham	Humbatov
Belgium Flemish Community (Co-Chair)	Magalie	Soenen
Belgium Flemish Community	Liesbeth	Hens
Belgium Flemish Community	Marielle	Van Heumen
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Maja	Macan
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Benjamin	Muhamedbegovic
Cyprus	Yiannis	Kasoulides
Czech Republic	Tereza	Krepelová
ENQA	Elena	Cirlan
	Patrick	Van den Bosch
EQAR	Melinda	Szabo
	Colin	Tück
European Students' Union (ESU)	Jakub	Grodecki
EUA	Maria	Kelo
European Commission	Marcel	Vysocky
European Commission (Eurydice)	David	Crosier
Finland	Helka	Kekäläinen
France	Solange	Pisarz
	Maud	Medves
Germany	Katrin	Mayer-Lantermann
Greece	Christina	Besta
Hungary	Attila	Szabo
Iceland	Sigriður	Geirsdóttir
Ireland	Bryan	Maguire
Italy	Cecilia	Bibbo
Kazakhstan (Co-Chair)	Rauza	Mendaliyeva
Kazakhstan	Gulzhan	Jarassova
Luxembourg	Isabelle	Reinhardt
Malta	Giacomo	Annese
The Netherlands	Marianne	van Exel
Poland	Jakub	Brdulak
Romania (Co-Chair)	Daniela Cristina	Ghițulică
Romania	Tuca	Petrisor-Laurentiu
Slovak Republic	Peter	Ondreička
Slovenia	Maja	Milas
Slovenia	Natasa	Kramar
Sweden	Ulf	Hedbjörk
Sweden	Maria (Maya)	Wikse
VLUHR-KZ	Stefanie	Van der Jeugt
BFUG Secretariat (Head)	Oltion	Rrumbullaku

1. Welcome by the Co-Chairs of the TPG C on QA

The Co-Chairs welcomed all participants to the first in-presence meeting of the Thematic Peer Group on Quality Assurance of the 2021-2024 work period. An outline of the agenda was provided, which was adopted without changes.

For more information, please see: [TPG C FR AZ Agenda](#)

2. Tour de table

All participants introduced themselves and their respective roles, as well as their specific contribution to the Quality Assurance peer group.

3. State-of-play and work plan of TPG C

Magalie Soenen (Co-Chair) delivered background information on the work of the Quality Assurance group, covering the period from 2018 to the present day. She confirmed that the TPG C on Quality Assurance (QA) has been evaluated by all members and ministers as successful, and a new mandate was issued in 2021 by the Rome Communiqué with Belgium Flemish Community, Romania and Kazakhstan appointed as Co-Chairs.

It was stated that 41 countries and 7 stakeholder organisations in the Bologna Process have signed up for the TPG C. An online kick-off meeting was organized in June 2021, followed by a webinar on the staff mobility scheme between ministries and QA agencies, organized to support individual needs of countries. The TPG has set up an action plan for which 33 countries have already sent input. The importance of cooperation and communication between the QA agency and the ministry in order to set up the country pages in the action plan, was emphasized. It was also underlined that all sections of the action plan should be filled in so that the information could be correlated and easy to use. The action plan was described as a living document, amenable to be adapted, updated and changed if and when necessary, while the remaining countries were invited to send their contribution as soon as possible.

The thematic orientations taken up by the TPG C on QA were listed, including Legislative Framework in line with the ESG, Internal Quality Assurance, Enhancement-Oriented use of the ESG, the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, Cross-Border QA, Quality Assurance of micro-credentials, Quality Assurance of European Universities, and the Digitalization of the QA Processes.

Stakeholder and student engagement was a topic that was also mentioned in many countries' action plans as an area of interest. The Co-Chairs reminded the participants that a project on stakeholder engagement was implemented during the previous work programme. It assessed the status and identified methods and good practices of enhancing stakeholder involvement in quality assurance activities. The members were also reminded that EQAR and other organisations offer data and tools that can be used by countries.

Some of the most important projects mentioned in the action plan were the IMINQA project, as the main umbrella project to support the peer group, the Quality Assurance Fit for Future (QA-FIT), Supporting European QA Agencies in meeting the ESG –round 2 (SEQA-ESG 2) project, and the Bologna with Stakeholders Eyes for an Innovative, Inclusive and Interconnected EHEA by 2030 (BWSE FOR 2030).

Following the input from the different national action plans, an initial analysis revealed the topics of interest for each country.¹ Future cooperation between countries is to be based on

¹ Internal Quality Assurance (mentioned by 23 countries as a topic in their action plan); Enhancement-Oriented use of ESG (20 countries), Legislative Framework in line with the ESG (19 countries), Quality Assurance of micro-credentials (14 countries), Digitalization of QA processes (9 countries), European Approach (8 countries), European Quality Assurance of European Universities (8 countries).

these results. To this end, the group was reminded to send input, updates and adaptations of the action plan.

In conclusion, the importance of focusing on the implementation of the key commitment and the collaboration between agencies and the ministry was reiterated. As such, the action plan should address the need to liaise between national institutions and QA agencies, and not focus solely on the perspective of the agency and its challenges.

For more information, please see: [State-of-play and work plan of TPG C](#)

4. QA in the Bologna Implementation Report: from 2020 to 2024

David Crosier (European Commission, Eurydice) gave a historical overview of the development of QA during the 20 years of the Bologna Process. He pointed out that the data used was from 2018/19, which prevents the current report from reflecting the impact of the work done since the establishment of the TPG in the present results.

It was emphasized that QA underwent significant changes in the first decade, resulting in a rise in the number of countries adopting a recognizable QA system². The first decade marked many developments such as the placement of the primary responsibility for quality assurance on the institutions, the development of the European standards and Guidelines, the creation of EQAR, among others.

The second decade marked a widening of the European concept of QA. Two phenomena mentioned were Quality Culture becoming an established idea and the tendency for enhancement-oriented QA beginning to supersede compliance models. The trend of this decade moved towards institutional level QA, revisions of the European Standards and Guidelines, and the adoption of the European Approach to Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.

Some of the remaining challenges noted were establishing practices of trust among institutions and the full implementation of key commitments. Slow progress was observed in two areas: the level of student participation in external QA and the level of international participation in external QA. According to the presentation, student participation, international participation and the adoption of the European Approach to quality assurance of joint programmes showed no particular progress, whereas institutions' ability to benefit of a cross border quality assurance procedure was a dynamic indicator.

In conclusion, the importance of implementing ESG-based QA everywhere was reiterated, as this represents the very foundation of the EHEA. Emerging areas of debate were listed, including the role of QA in upholding values and it was clarified that these debates can stand to become even more explicit. Lastly, it was suggested that in post-COVID times the relation between QA and social dimension and sustainable development goals could be prioritized, as these areas may have suffered some regress during the pandemic.

For more information, please see: [TPG C on QA – Bologna Implementation Report 2020](#) and [The European Higher Education Area in 2020: Bologna Process Implementation Report](#)

5. How to participate in IMINQA, the umbrella project for TPG C?

Magalie Soenen (Co-Chair) announced the approval of the Implementation and Innovation in Quality Assurance through Peer Learning project (IMINQA), which will run for 3 years. Details about the project were shared: partners³, experts, budget and other technical information.

² Twenty-two countries established an external quality assurance agency for the first time during that decade.

³ The total grant of the project is max. €500,000 for all planned activities. The project consortium consists of the Ministry of Education and Training Belgium/Flemish Community as coordinator, the Romanian co-chair, ENQA and EQAR. Because only EU

It was explained that the project consists of seven work packages (WP), that were presented in detail. The first WP referred to management, administration, financial management, quality assurance, communication and dissemination of the project. The second WP referred to six major TPG meetings to be held over a three-year period. The third WP addressed staff mobility⁴, with particular focus on each country's specific needs and challenges, and ought to be implemented through the cooperation between respective agencies and ministries in each member country. The fourth WP focused on three peer learning activities⁵, each being preceded by cross-cutting analysis. These work packages focused on the implementation of the key commitment, while the next work packages were more related to innovative topics.

The fifth WP, QA of Micro-Credentials, builds on the MICROBOL project's work and focuses specifically on the quality assurance aspect. It was noted that guidance documents for higher education institutions and QA agencies would be developed based on research. Also, work related to DEQAR and data standards would be tackled. The sixth WP on QA in European HEIs is a deepening of the EUniQ project's results, with an emphasis on moving forward at the country's policy level. The seventh and final WP focused on digitalisation of QA agencies processes and procedures. Here, the WGs would explore methods in which various agencies have integrated digitalization into their activities, such as assessment processes, as well as how digitalisation supports data storage, management, and exchange.

The IMINQA project presentation was concluded with mentions of the selected research methods to be used, primary surveys and interviews. Lastly, it was emphasized that members would be regularly informed on the developments of the IMINQA project and that conclusions and future recommendations would be shared upon completion of the project.

For more information, please see: [Umbrella project: Implementation and innovation in Quality Assurance through peer learning \(IMINQA\)](#)

6. Presentation: Other projects in the field of QA

ENQA presented two new projects that they will coordinate. The first project "Supporting European QA Agencies in meeting the ESG II (SEQA-ESG 2)", that will be implemented in partnership with NEAQQA (Serbia), AHERS (Bosnia and Herzegovina), HEA (Bosnia and Herzegovina), TKTA (Azerbaijan), and NAQA (Ukraine), aims to support the five agencies towards their compliance with the ESG,.

The main activities of the project included peer-counseling and peer learning workshops. The main deliverables will be the system action plans, where each agency, in collaboration with their respective stakeholders, will develop a list of country-specific priority actions in the area of (external) quality assurance.

The second project⁶, "Quality Assurance Fit for the Future (QA-FIT)", aims to carry out a comprehensive mapping of the state of internal and external quality assurance within the EHEA. It was clarified that, in this context, the project will also take a critical look at ESGs and how they have been adopted and adapted in different contexts. Furthermore, the project will examine how quality assurance activities deal with recent and new developments in higher education (HE) and gather perspectives on the future of ESG quality assurance activities.

countries and organizations are eligible as full partners under the European Commission call, the Kazakhstan co-chair could not be included as a partner, but will be involved as one of the three experts in the project.

⁴ Two calls for proposals are scheduled in 2022 and 2023. The result of the first call will be announced in September, and mobility will take place from October 1 to the end of March 2023. The financial incentives on the project side include travel and accommodation costs. See the EHEA website for the call and a report on the results of the last project.

⁵ The first PLA will take place on September 1, 2022 (BE) on "Alignment of the legal framework with the ESG"; the second PLA is planned for March 2023 (RO) on "Cross Border Quality Assurance (CBQA) & Quality Assurance of TNB"; the third PLA in September 2023 (BE) on "European Approach to Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes."

⁶ ENQA, ESU, EUA, EURASHE, EQAR, Alianta nationala a organizatiilor studentesti din Romania (ANOSR RO), the Finnish education evaluation center (FINNEC), Irish universities association (IUA) and the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia (MOESGE).

For more information, please see: [Projects in the field of QA](#)

The third project presented was the “Bologna with Stakeholders’ Eyes for an Innovative, Inclusive and Connected European Higher Education Area by 2030”, coordinated by the European Students’ Union (ESU). The project, which involves various partners, is still in its initial phase and aims to cover a broader spectrum, that includes but is not limited to QA. The project will start with a PLA and will be finalized with a publication.

The PLA on QA will be focused on participation in co-leadership at the agency and management levels. The information on QA will be expanded to include results from focus groups and surveys, and attempts will be made to expand the reach of the final publication through the PLA, research and dissemination.

For more information, please see: [Bologna With Students’ Eyes](#)

7. Parallel sessions

Members were divided into parallel sessions to discuss on the topics of Legislative framework in line with the ESG, Digitalisation of quality assurance processes, Enhancement-oriented use of the ESG, Cross-border Quality Assurance, the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes and Internal quality assurance and quality culture. The conclusions were presented in the subsequent session of the agenda.

8. Feedback from the parallel sessions: Exchange of expectations and proposals on cooperation of the different countries

Following the discussions in the parallel sessions, challenges of internationalization and **cross-border quality assurance (QA)** were presented. The session specifically covered two main dimensions: (1) *Cross-border QA (CBQA)*: HEIs seeking accreditation/evaluation by a QA agency (QAA) from another country and (2) *QA of transnational education (TNE)*: QA of HEIs offering education programmes in another country than their home/base country. Cross border QA was noted as an area with an established EHEA commitment, while QA of TNE does not enjoy the same EHEA commitment – this raises the question whether TNE is adequately covered by existing external QA systems in the EHEA. More analysis of available data and additional future data on cross border QA and a peer learning activity was deemed necessary, tackling the development of QA agency capabilities to systematically assess cross-border provisions.

The conclusions regarding the **legislative framework in line with the ESG**, underlined reflection on how the role of QA is defined and to what extent provisions regarding QA should be detailed in national legislation. It was concluded that QA is context-specific and that its proper development may also involve legal departments and Ministries of Justice. The question of which QA aspects should be addressed in legal documents was brought up and current barriers in introducing QA legislation were cited, most prominently a changing and unstable government. It was suggested that the way forward is for QA agencies and ministries to reach a better understanding of one another roles and activities when collaborating.

The discussion on the topic of the **digitalization of QA processes** centered on what has been achieved during the pandemic and which processes from this period should be kept. A hybrid solution of online and site visits was suggested, citing that discussions with the students should continue to take place in person. Other topics discussed were data sharing on external evaluators among countries and the similarity among QA processes on e-learning and micro-credentials. The concluding question addressed the extent to which QA processes should be adapted to changing needs or redesigned based on digital needs.

On **enhancement-oriented use of ESG**, it was discussed whether QA and the enhancement role of QA may be treating the same purpose and whether they should be administered

according to a logical sequence or simultaneously. While it was determined that, within the Bologna Process, QA precedes enhancement, there may be a way of combining accreditation and enhancement. In conclusion, methods or training that support the role of the agency as an enabler of enhancement were suggested.

The presentation on **internal QA** introduced an attempt among group members to define quality culture which involved (1) ways of collaboration and teamwork, (2) attitudes of positivity, tolerance and self-reflection and (3) technical and procedural aspects. Two important suggestions were the valorization of staff and students for their contributions to internal QA activities and the organization of internal training and information sessions on QA and its direct benefits for teaching and learning processes. Also, the connection between QA and the actual teaching and learning process and student success must be made. Lastly, quality culture was defined as a dynamic process, which requires continuous attention.

Regarding **the European Approach**, an increased awareness since 2018-2019 was confirmed with the two most prominent contributing factors being the internationalization of higher education and the European Universities Initiative. It was noted, however, that many countries' still do not consider the European Approach a priority. It was asked whether QA agencies should push for the full adoption of the European Approach (EA) and whether the latter is in need of amendment. Some barriers to the adoption of the EA included a lack of data on joint programmes and the struggle of universities to have joint programmes accredited by QA agencies and recognized by all countries in the European Universities Alliance.

Comments were made citing the low number of existing joint programmes and the current HE legislation acting as an inhibitor to the development of joint programmes. It was noted that a supportive framework with legislation and accreditation procedures can incentivize HEIs to create joint programmes. The lack of uniformity in the rules and requirements of different programmes were cited as barriers that can be amended through partnership agreements. Awareness campaigns and presentations on the European Approach among ministries across Europe were suggested.

It was also clarified that two topics that were not discussed, the **QA of micro-credentials** and the **QA of European universities**, will have working groups devoted to them.

The floor was subsequently opened for discussion on the specific needs of each country. Azerbaijan's concerns focused on academic integrity, the rise of the plagiarism industry in the form of platforms that sell assignments. In Ireland these enterprises have been criminalized, teachers have been encouraged to create more resilient assessments, and QA agencies are working to fight this as cybercrime in the regulatory sphere. It was decided not to duplicate work, as the topic of academic integrity is already being dealt within ENQA and the BFUG. In Armenia, the tools and different approaches of thematic analysis as well as internal QA of agencies are of importance.

One important question asked was how QA agencies can support the national objectives on SDGs. One suggestion was to have QA agencies start audits and evaluations, which would then identify relevant good practices and successful cases of sustainable development. It was revealed that there exists a ranking of the contributions of HEIs to the SDGs, which presents a multitude of contribution types. Upon conclusion, a system of matchmaking among members on specific topics (i.e., inclusion of foreign experts, student reviews, programme accreditation) was suggested.

9. European Students' Union pool of experts

Jakub Grodecki (ESU) presented the European Students' Union (ESU) pool of experts, with main focus on developing student participation in quality assurance in the EHEA. It was explained that ESU's pool consists of highly-qualified student experts with national and

international experience in QA for partner accreditation agencies and HEIs. With experts in more than 20 countries, the pool is renewed annually only for enrolled students and recent graduates, who are highly encouraged to participate, and it is coordinated through an independent steering committee⁷. ESU's pool consists of the presidency, an executive committee member and three steering committee members.

It was highlighted that ESU's pool is gender balanced and includes students from various disciplines. Its mission and values are in accordance with the values of ESU in boosting capacity-building, particularly that of international students and experts in the field of QA, by increasing professionalism, integrity and transparency. To this end, it was clarified that the QA pool members are professional QA reviewers and experienced student representatives, who reflect the students' perspective in QA reviews and other QA related activities. In addition, the QA pool develops hands-on trainings, with focus on innovative and interactive teaching and learning approaches.

Of particular importance is the communication and outreach within ESU's QA pool, as well as to external stakeholders, which is tackled by making the documents available to all pool members. It was also noted that the distribution of QA relevant information enables the knowledge flow and the publishing of QA related contributions. Another effective supporting mechanism is the establishment of an alumni network of past pool members, which promotes the QA pool model as a student organized and led example, in which students are responsible and accountable partners within the QA community. Another aim is to establish connections to the national QA pools. It was finally noted that ESU is working on a sustainable handover and documentation practices, which includes the official validation of members' work, as required by some of their universities.

For more information, please see: [ESU pool of experts](#)

10. Next activities of the TPG

It was announced that a call for applications for staff mobility will be issued soon after the meeting, with a deadline at the end of July. By the end of September, the results will be available. PLA activities will also commence in Belgium, with the first PLA on ESG (1 September 2022) being prepared by colleagues of EQAR. The WG on QA on Micro-credentials (first meeting 2 September 2022) and the WG on QA in European Universities (first meeting 17 June 2022) will be the following activities, a call for participation will be sent out soon. In November, the TPG C will have its subsequent meeting in an online format.

11. Closing and way forward

No other issues were raised, thus the first TPG C meeting was concluded with thanks to the Co-Chairs for a successful organization of the meeting and to the members for their contributions.

⁷ ESU's QA Pool Steering Committee maintains an appropriate level of autonomy over the professional development and internal activities regarding ESU's QA Pool which includes the guidance and supervision of the EC and the presidency member in regards to the financial, organizational and representative aspects, provides advice for the establishment and engages in the activities of ESU's Pool of Trainers by sharing experiences and the knowledge from within ESU's QA Pool management.