2016 Members' Forum – Budapest
Conclusions from the breakout sessions

<u>Quality assurance and research (Durdica Dragojevic and Anne Flierman)</u>

All agencies look at research activity in connection to study programs – primarily, if teachers' projects and publications are in line with and included in what they teach; if programmes include research and if students have a chance to collaborate with teachers on it; if a research environment exists (external funding, laboratories etc.). Some agencies do programme accreditations for research programs at master and doctoral level however these are in principle not different from other programme accreditations, except that they might look at additional requirements by the state, such as obligatory external funding or percentage of teachers with PhDs. Those agencies that do audits also look at processes connected to research, and some offer 'research' as a special audit trail. In the evaluation of PhD programmes, generally speaking the focus lays on the teaching part. Some concerns were voiced as to the position of research in undergraduate programmes at research universities, since some institutions tend to economize on qualified staff, with a research experience, for these programmes.

The challenge is primarily how to assess the progress done since last evaluation – and explain to external stakeholders that this is what is really assessed, as opposed to a ranking which would only look at the current state – which is especially pertinent for institutions that are not very research-oriented or too small to do much of relevant research.

Very few agencies also do research evaluation per se, and there is a discussion if results of research evaluations should be used by reviewers when evaluation HEIs – most agree that they should, however it is also possible to argue that reviewers are not detectives and they should not use anything beyond the institutional website and the self-evaluation report. The challenge in evaluating research is in assessing quality as opposed to quantity, and in respecting differences between fields. Some agencies (e.g in Hungary or Spain) also have a role in evaluating senior staff for their promotions. Other agencies can give a specific qualification to institutions who pay special attention to the relation between education and research.

It was also considered that a differentiation should be made between research in research universities, and in polytechnics or universities of applied science. This has to do with the nature of the research done at each type of institution, but also with the way the connection between research and education is made in teaching programmes at the respective institutions.

In the guidelines of the ESG, part I (1.5) a reference to the relation between research and teaching is made.

Finally, it was observed that there is comparatively little research on the quality, requirements or methods for teaching in higher education. The best known exception is the research programmes in medical education.

<u>Fraud in higher education (Claudia Gelleni and Salvador Rus)</u>

Agencies cannot do everything to prevent or to avoid fraud in HE. But they can help the academics authorities and the judges to persecute fraud. They can elaborate the proofs and the evidences to punish the fraud and the defrauders. Fraud is a big problem for European higher education institutions.

Agencies could improve the universities and the research centres to have an ethics code and to require all members of the institutions to follow it.

Agencies must create efficient mechanisms to prevent, to detect and to follow the fraud.

Agencies must offer to the universities and the research centres instruments to detect and to follow fraud. It means that agencies have to implement the follow up of the activities of those institutions.

If an institution detects fraud, the people responsible for this bad practice must suffer some sanctions or this behaviour has to have consequences with penalties.

One goal for all agencies is to create a Pan European Ethical Platform in Higher Education (PEPHE), in order to share and to transfer information on institutions and persons.

Fraud is very wide and broad. In fact, apart from illegal documents and institutions, or counterfeited documents, there is also a type of fraud consisting of recruiting students that eventually disappear as they are not really students (illegal immigration disguised as student immigration).

It is fundamental to share and disseminate information. This is why cooperation between QA agencies, HEIs and ENIC-NARICs is essential. Admission procedures are to be dealt with great care and knowledge of good practice. Only the fluid shared work of the three stakeholders can facilitate smooth procedures and good practice in detecting and combating fraud.

In some countries QA agencies and ENIC-NARICs are within the same organisation. This helps a lot for the dissemination of information and good practice.

QA, in particular external QA, is there to assure transparency and reliability in order to limit as much as possible this phenomenon. Regular monitoring of QA procedures and HEIs has been implemented by some countries. Some others implemented diplomas' database enabling to check whether a diploma has been really issued.

Site visits should be done on a regular basis to enhance QA and the possibility to withdraw accreditation envisaged in case unclear/illegal procedures are identified.

Importance of raising awareness, in particular with HEIs. It is their responsibility to respond, the problem lies often with their capability of doing so.

For some agencies, the problem concerns start-up HEIs and legitimate, but non recognized ones. In fact, they sometimes leave the door opened to illegal practice in order to have the business run. It would be a good thing to verify who the owner is.