

# Exploring synergies between quality assurance and qualifications recognition

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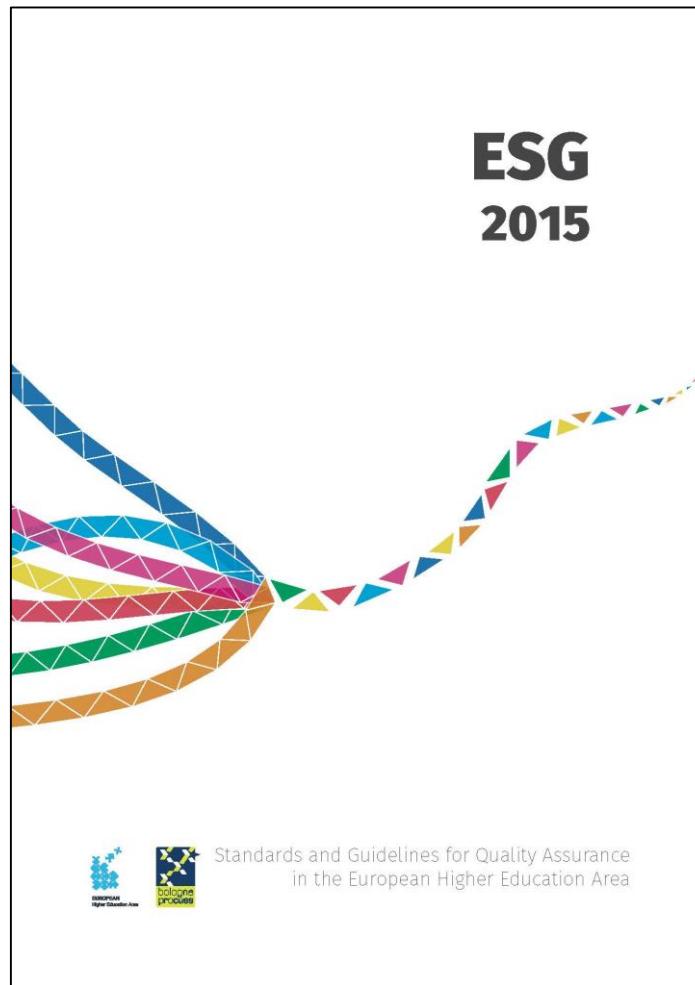
**20 June 2017, ENQA networking event**

# Fact 1



Type of process, object of analysis, discipline,  
organization, regional coverage, HE context

# Fact 2



A common framework: European Standards and Guidelines for QA in the EHEA

# Fact 3



The agencies will need to constantly rethink their position and role as promoters of change in the sector of higher education, aware of **their potential to have a strong impact**, in the overall development and trends, but also conscious of **being only one among many drivers** of improvement and enhancement.

*Report of the ENQA WG 1 on Impact of Quality Assurance*

# Who are we?

A highly **diverse population**,  
working in the field of **EQA**,  
on the basis of a **common standard**  
trying very strongly to be relevant and have a **positive impact**  
over the development of the EHEA.

Learning outcomes  
Qualifications frameworks  
Internationalization of HE  
Cross-border HE

**Academic recognition**

# Academic recognition

Range of **recognition policies and practices** (most frequently put in place by higher education institutions) in the following contexts:

- *Recognition of formal academic qualifications* in a context of admission for further studies;
- *Recognition of periods of study* (credits) gained in other institutions (domestic or abroad); i.e. credits achieved as part of an Erasmus exchange.
- *Recognition (normally, in a context of admission) of prior learning*, also known as recognition of informal and non-formal learning.

# Principles and tools at the European Level

- **Lisbon Recognition Convention** (five principles for recognition)
- Two networks: European Network of Information Centres in the European Region (**ENIC**) and the National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union (**NARIC**)
- **Tools:** Diploma Supplement, Qualifications Frameworks, ESG

# Context

- Fair recognition of qualifications, periods of study, and prior learning is one of the **main objectives** of the Bologna Process.
- After two decades of existence, implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention is **still a challenge** (*Bologna Process Implementation Report, 2015*)
- Recognition is largely within the **hands of HEIs**.
- The fact that **higher education institutions** are **autonomous**, and the member states have limited capacity to bind them to the principles of the LRC, is identified as a major challenge.

**What can the QA community do about this?**



**QA “saving” recognition?**

# ENQA's vision and ESG 1.4

**ENQA's vision (2016-2020 ENQA Strategic Plan)**

**“A European Higher Education Area where students have access to high quality education and can achieve qualifications that are respected worldwide”**

## ***ESG 1.4 (2015 version)***

*Fair recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study, and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, are essential components for ensuring the students' progress in their studies, while promoting mobility. Appropriate recognition procedures rely on:*

- *institutional practice for recognition being in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention;*
- *cooperation with other institutions, quality assurance agencies, and the national ENIC/NARIC centre with a view to ensuring coherent recognition across the country.*

# ENQA WORKING GROUP VII ON QUALITY ASSURANCE AND RECOGNITION. OBJECTIVES

**“Mapping current practices** on external quality assurance of academic recognition among ENQA agencies, **identifying challenges and best practices**, and developing strategies to **disseminate** the group’s research”



Meeting in Madrid (ANECA), 16 of January 2017

# ENQA WORKING GROUP VII ON QUALITY ASSURANCE AND RECOGNITION

- Self-funded by members (with support and contribution by ENQA)
- Working from July 2015 to June 2017

## Members of the working group:

Teresa Sánchez Chaparro, **CTI, France** (chair)

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Rafael Llavori de Micheo, **ANECA, Spain**

Aurelija Valeikienė, **SKVC, Lithuania**

Under the coordination of **Lindsey Kerber (ENQA)**

# Methodology

- Consideration of the **main bibliographic references** and **on-going initiatives** (Bologna Implementation Report, FAIR Project, ECA initiatives, MasterMind Project, EAR manuals, SQUARE Project, etc.)
- **Exploratory survey** to quality assurance (QA) agencies (ENQA members and affiliates) launched in **September 2016**
- Organisation of a **reflexion and dissemination event** hosted by QQI, in Dublin in 1-2 June 2017 under the title “Exploring synergies between quality assurance and qualifications recognition” (addressed to QA agencies, ENIC-NARICs and HEIs)

# Results

1. **Explore the links between QA and recognition in a broad sense** (role, interest and mandate)
2. **Explore relationships between QAA and ENIC-NARIC centres.**
3. **Map current practices on EQA of academic recognition policies and practices (ESG 1.4).**
4. **Identify main issues and challenges for QAA, ENIC-NARICs and HEIs regarding IQA and EQA of recognition.**
5. **Identify next steps and possible directions for solutions**

## Objective 1

**Explore the links between QA and recognition in a broad sense (role, interest and mandate). Beyond ESG 1.4**

## Facilitation

- Collaboration with other bodies (France, Ireland)
- Individual certificates (Albania, France)

## QA services abroad

- Recognition is an expectation
- Informal and formal mechanisms

## Core content of EQA (ESG part 1)

## Disciplinary networks

- EUR-ACE, EURO-INF, EQUAL, ECCE
- Mutual recognition agreement (EUR-ACE)

## Regulation

- Conditions on transfer students, prior learning... (engineering, chiropractics)

## Objective 2

**Explore relationships between QAAs  
and ENIC-NARIC centres**

# Relationship with ENIC-NARIC

- In some cases (around 20%) **QA agency and the ENIC-NARIC are part of the same organisation.**
- However, being under the same roof does not necessarily translate in agile communication and mutual learning:

**“Relationships are often non-formal, and there is a need to evolve towards more structured and fruitful ways of communication.”**

## Examples of joint initiatives (from “good practice” Nuffic-NVAO)

- Receiving and sharing international delegations
- Referring delegations to each other’s organisations
- Presentations at each other’s conferences
- Joint Erasmus+ projects

## Other collaboration contexts

- **EQA of cross-border HE** ( assessments of joint programmes where at least one of the partners is based outside the country)
- **Cross-border QA** (request of information from foreign HEIs and qualifications requesting EQA processes from the agency)
- **Issues of recognition** of certain **national qualifications** to make accreditation decisions (**minoritary**)
- **Initiatives around IQA and EQA of institutional practices** (seminars, participation of ENIC-NARIC in the procedure-guidelines, etc.).**Minoritary**

# Relationship with ENIC-NARIC



- There seems to be **considerable room for improvement** regarding collaboration between QA agencies and ENIC-NARIC bodies.
- **60%** of respondents to survey declare to have **only occasional or no contact** whatsoever with the ENIC-NARIC centre.
- **56%** of respondents declared that **their relationship with the ENIC-NARIC centre was likely to evolve** towards more frequent exchange and collaboration.
- Drivers: **new formulation of ESG 1.4 and the increased internationalisation of higher education.**

## Objective 3

**Map current practices on EQA of academic recognition policies and practices (ESG 1.4).**

# Typology. Three groups

**No explicit focus/  
In transition**



**65%**

**Focus on outcomes  
and metrics**



**12%**

**Explicit focus  
on EQA of  
recognition**



**23%**

# Focus on outcomes and metrics

Show a strong focus on controlling the outcomes of the recognition process. For some “a growing concern”.

“detect and eliminate from the system bad practices regarding academic recognition, either inappropriately restrictive or inappropriately lenient”.



Some common features:

- Accreditation agencies/disciplinary agencies
- High internationalization of HE system

Some focus on the matter “only if problems are detected” (risk-based approach through the monitoring of certain metrics at the institutional and system level)

12%

EQA processes do not necessarily focus on the aspects that would be more relevant for ESG 1.4 (general organisation of the recognition process within the institution, the use of the EAR tools and other information resources, the transparency of the process, and the main LRC principles...)

# Explicit focus on EQA of recognition



Show good alignment with the aspects that should be covered in their EQA processes according to ESG 1.4.



More systematic coverage of institutional practices and explicitly refer to the LRC principles and their associated tools.

Some common features:

- Awareness at the system level (Germany)
- Some agencies under same organization than ENIC-NARIC body
- High internationalization of HE sector and focus on QF

23%

# Explicit focus on EQA of recognition

Potential good practices, BUT challenges and open questions:



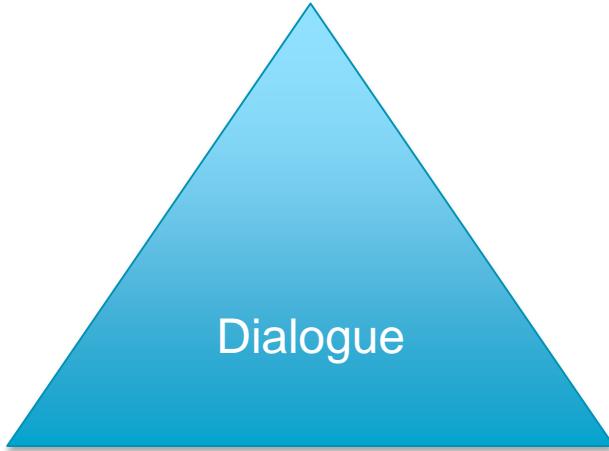
23%

- “Even though institutions might formally have “regulations” or IQA procedures covering the LRC principles, **interpretation and proper use in practice are in fact challenging** to the practitioners of these regulations” (difficulties for interpretation, multiplicity of actors and services involved, recognition often not conceptualized as a process different from admissions/selection)
- “**Recognition is a separate topic and criterion, requiring specific knowledge. It is really a challenge how to best address recognition matters via external quality assurance procedures, since recognition is a vast issue, and EQA are very condensed in time, a challenge of integration.**”

## Objective 4

**Identify main issues and challenges for QAA, ENIC-NARICs and HEIs regarding IQA and EQA of recognition.**

**HEIs**



Dialogue

**ENIC-  
NARICs**

**QAAs**

## HEIs-IQA

- What is the best **organisational setting** so as to ensure a **consistent** recognition practice within the institution?
- What are the most effective **IQA strategies** and **tools**?

## ENIC-NARICs

- Lack of **information and trust**
- Difficulties for cooperation with other bodies (QA agencies, professional bodies, etc.).
- Difficulties for ensuring transparent appeals processes.
- National qualifications frameworks are sometimes not consistent with the EQF.

## QAAs-EQA

- How to make recognition issues **a priority**, how to raise the general level of awareness among the QA community, without overloading already long, thorough EQA processes?
- What is **the best approach** to address recognition in EQA processes? Programme vs institutional approach, control vs enhancement-oriented processes, etc.

## Objective 5

**Identify next steps and possible directions for solutions**

# Four possible directions

## 1. Dissemination and building of awareness

There is a need to create spaces of collaboration and working groups among the three communities. Recognition issues should be made more **prominent in the agenda** of organisations at the European level, particularly the E4.

## 2. Exchange of good practice

Exchange of good practice among the HEI community is needed. QA agencies could greatly contribute through **thematic analysis**, which would provide a valuable basis for comparison. Other organisations (such as national rector's conferences) could act as facilitators for this exchange at the national level.

# Four possible directions

## 3. Establish clear guidelines for IQA and EQA

These guidelines would be much appreciated by HEIs and QA agencies. They should be established through **cooperation of the QA, HEI and ENIC-NARIC communities**. Participants agreed that the guidelines should provide some general **overarching principles**, most probably at the institutional level and respect national diversity and other specificities (such as those related to regulated professions). They should be **enhancement oriented** and focused on building capacity (not so much on control). One particular aspect to be developed in these guidelines seems to be the establishment of clear and transparent **appeal mechanisms**.

# Four possible directions

## 4. Develop EQA and peer review strategies at the level of the ENIC-NARIC community

This could be an area of cooperation between the QA and ENIC-NARIC communities which could greatly contribute to improve the quality of recognition and build a community of practice. These strategies would be most likely **transferable to the institutional level and vice-versa**, which would facilitate consistency at the level of all actors involved in recognition.

There are some ongoing initiatives in this sense, such as the SQUARE project

# Concluding remarks

- Agencies have a **considerable actual and potential impact** over recognition of qualifications (domestic/foreign) through several activities (core activities, facilitation, disciplinary networks, QA abroad) but recognition **is not currently a priority**.
- Although agencies report several collaboration initiatives, there seems to be **considerable room for improvement regarding collaboration between QA agencies and ENIC-NARIC bodies**.
- Regarding the EQA of institutional recognition practices (ESG 1.4), **a minority of agencies** seems to explicitly consider recognition practices as part of the IQA system within the higher education institutions and analyse whether they are in line with the LRC principles.
- Even those agencies that show an explicit focus on the LRC and in the EQA of recognition practices, have **several challenges and interrogations (issue under development)**

**Progress to this regard will come out from the dialogue and collaboration among three communities: HEIs, QA agencies and ENIC-NARICs (QA agencies only one among many drivers of change)**

**Next steps:**



**ENQA publication on the results of the WG (Occassional paper)**

**LIREQA Erasmus + initiative ( Linking Academic Recognition and Quality Assurance):** QA, HEI and ENIC-NARIC communities working together towards the preparation of IQA and EQA guidelines for recognition.

# Discussion



Thank you!