

How European QA agencies deal with recognition: findings from the ENQA working group VII on QA and recognition

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Exploring synergies between quality assurance and qualifications recognition

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Motivation

- 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 LRC 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?

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.*

Motivation



QA “saving” recognition?

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)
- Current project has been conducted from July 2015 to June 2017

Members of the working group:

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

Carme Edo Ros, **AQU Catalunya, Spain**

Eva Fernández de Labastida, **Unibasq, Spain**

Marie-Jo Goedert, **CTI, France**

Kyrre Goksøyr, **NOKUT, Norway**

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Maria Kelo, **ENQA, Europe**

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

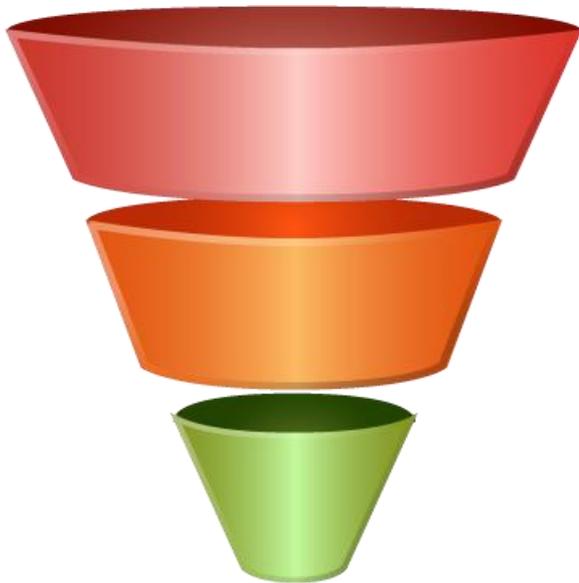
Aurelija Valeikienė, **SKVC, Lithuania**

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, etc.)
- **Exploratory survey** to quality assurance (QA) agencies (ENQA members and affiliates) launched in **September 2016**.

Objectives



1. **Explore the links between QA and recognition in a broad sense** (role, interest and mandate)
2. **Explore relationships between ENQA and ENIC-NARIC centres.**
3. **Map current practices on EQA of academic recognition policies and practices (ESG 1.4).**

Number and profile of respondents

- **36 members (71%) and 12 affiliates (24%)**
- **Focus:**
 - **10 %** operate at **institutional** level
 - **16%** at **programme** level
 - **66% at both levels**
 - **8%** declared to have **additional or alternative focus**, such as evaluation of research, programmes, services, consultancy, etc.
- **Specificity:**
 - **82%** are **generalistic** agencies
 - **12% subject-specific** agencies.

Number and profile of respondents



- **23%** of QAA conduct **QA processes outside their boundaries.**
- **2** agencies are **not linked to a specific national jurisdiction** but declare to be international or European QA bodies.

Preliminary note 1. The context

- Some important **context factors** that complexify the analysis
 - Principles of the **LRC embedded or not in national legislation**
 - Presence of an **ENIC-NARIC body** in the country and its specific role
 - Degree of **internationalisation** of the higher education system.
 - Specific national issues: **diploma mills, refugees.**
 - **Number of actors** involved in the national quality assurance system and their specific roles regarding recognition

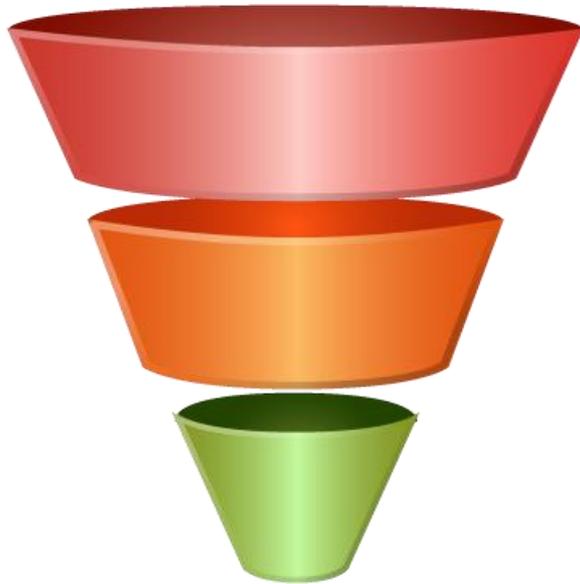
**A purely quantitative analysis of the answers could be misleading.
A more qualitative approach has been applied in the analysis**



Preliminary note 2. Identification

- An important number of agencies **(37%) refused permission for ENQA to identify their organization** in the final report (under development in many agencies?)
- Particular cases mentioned in this presentation are not to be considered as “best” or “good” practices, but as merely **illustrative examples** coming from the agencies that granted permission to be mentioned in the report.





Objective 1

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

Core content of EQA (ESG part 1)

Impact over:



Recognition of **domestic**
qualifications **abroad**

Impact over the five relevant dimensions of a qualification: **level, workload, quality, profile, and learning outcomes**

ESG 1.2: Design and approval of programmes

ESG 1.8: Public information

ESG 1.4: Certification; DS

“Official” status of qualification or institution

Core content of EQA (ESG part 1)

Impact over:

- Recognition of **domestic** qualifications **abroad**
- ← Recognition of **foreign** qualifications at **home**

**ESG 1.4: Institutional
recognition practices**

Facilitation

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

**Core content
of EQA
(ESG part 1)**

Facilitation

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

Core content of EQA (ESG part 1)

Disciplinary networks

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

Facilitation

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

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)

Facilitation

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

Core content of EQA (ESG part 1)

QA services abroad

- Recognition is an expectation
- Informal and formal mechanisms

Disciplinary networks

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

Regulation

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

Lack of transparency regarding feedback information on how domestic and foreign qualifications are recognized (**key success indicator**)



Facilitation

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

Core content of EQA (ESG part 1)

QA services abroad

- Recognition is an expectation
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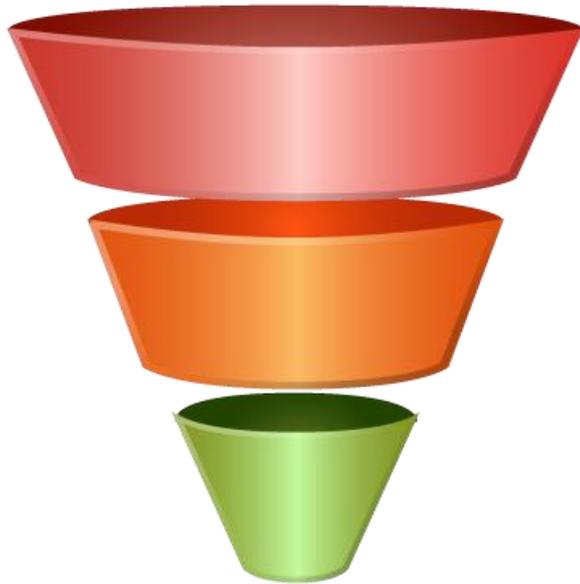
Disciplinary networks

- 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 ENQA
and ENIC-NARIC centres**

Relationship with ENIC-NARIC

- In **18% of cases (9 agencies)**, the **QA agency and the ENIC-NARIC are part of the same organisation.**
- ANECA (Spain) is not officially the ENIC-NARIC body in the country but has a mandate to provide information on individual qualifications leading to official recognition decisions.
- However, being under the same roof does not necessarily translate in agile communication and mutual learning:

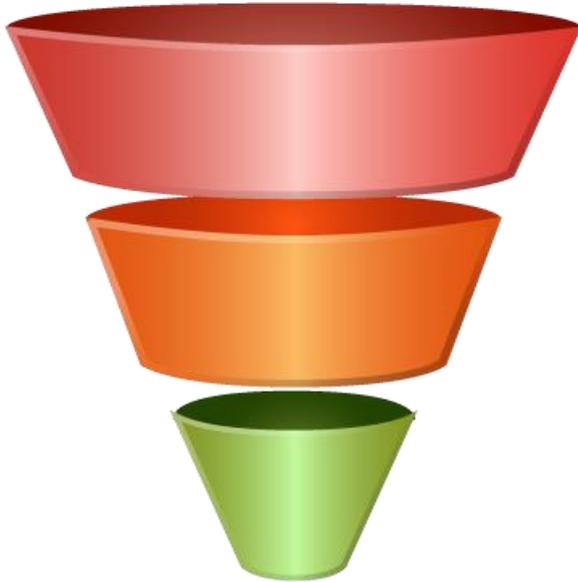
“Relationships are often non-formal, and there is a need to evolve towards more structured and fruitful ways of communication.”

Cooperation contexts mentioned:

- Questions and inquiries from **foreign students** on how to achieve academic or professional recognition in the country.
- **Foreign** HEIs and qualifications **requesting EQA** processes from the agency.
- **Assessments of joint programmes** where at least one of the partners is based outside the country.
- Promotion of **thematic networks** (ENAAE, EURO-INF, ECTNA) and their possible roles as facilitators for recognition of qualifications.
- Participation of the **ENIC-NARIC** centre in the **preparation of the sections regarding institutional recognition and admission processes** in the self-evaluation guidelines provided by the agency to HEIs
- Information provided by the ENIC-NARIC centre concerning the **issues of recognition** of certain national qualifications to make accreditation decisions.
- Organisation of **events or seminars** addressed to HEIs on the LRC
- Building of **common databases or information systems**.

Relationship with ENIC-NARIC

- There seems to be **considerable room for improvement** regarding collaboration between QA agencies and ENIC-NARIC bodies.
- **60%** of respondents 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%

No explicit focus/ in transition

No explicit criteria covering institutional recognition practices (implicit under a general section: “admissions”, “selection”)

Institutional recognition practices are **not central** when conducting their EQA processes:

- No explicit reference to the LRC or associated tools are made in their guidelines/documents.
- Not generally part of the discussion during the on-site visit
- Not explicitly covered in the reports.

1/3 in transition. Drivers:

- Regulatory changes (incorporation of LRC principles)
- Internal changes (governance, strategy)
- National debate on diploma mills, refugees, prior learning, increase in modularity
- ESG 2015

2/3 do not plan to change the way they handle recognition processes in the medium term



65%

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%

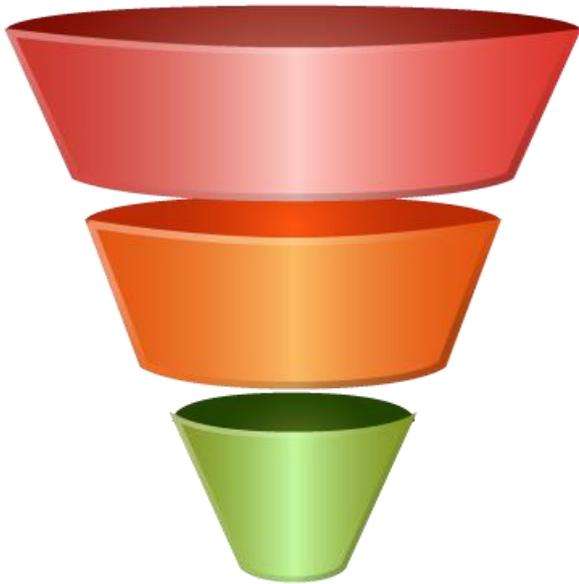
Explicit focus on EQA of recognition

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)
- **Focus less on “formal compliance” and more on “implementation”?**
- **“Include recognition in a more systematic way”**. However:
- **“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.”**



Concluding remarks

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)
- 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 a explicit focus on the LRC and in the EQA of recognition practices, have **several challenges and interrogations (issue under development)**

Some possible improvement directions for the QA community:

- Stress role of the agency at **increasing transparency** of institutional recognition practices and outcomes (not so much in checking “regulations”) at an individual and at an aggregate level (**subject for thematic analysis**)
- **Dissemination** and capacity building in collaboration with ENIC-NARIC networks (community of practice) towards HEI (formalization of recognition as a distinctive process that can be managed and quality assured; information sharing and knowledge building in a “community of practice”)
- Raise awareness at the **system level** on the recognition issues and the LRC (**collaborate with governments** and other stakeholders to set clear criteria and indicators)

A set of common guidelines developed at the level of the ENQA community regarding IQA/EQA of institutional recognition practices would be highly appreciated (attention to diversity)



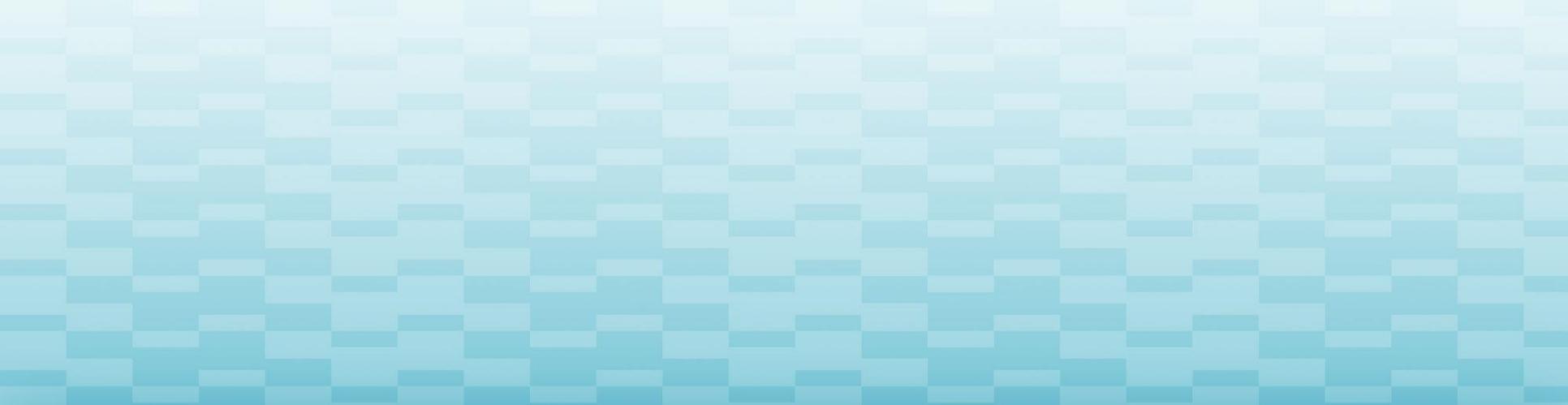
Next steps:

ENQA publication on the results of the WG (Occasional 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!

