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 Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)
- European Standards and Guidelines for QA in HE
- European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies (EQAR)
- European Diploma Supplement (DS)
- Lisbon Recognition Convention
- European HE Qualifications frameworks
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
• 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