

News from the EHEA: revised ESG and European approach to QA of joint programmes

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Structure of the presentation

- News from the Yerevan Ministerial Conference
- Revised ESG: what do they mean for IQA?
- European approach for QA of joint programmes: what is it?
- How to make most of EQA

Yerevan, May 2015- some outcomes

- Ministerial Communique
 - Strong importance given to the **conceptual shift to student-centered learning** (from teaching to learning and from inputs to outcomes; flexible learning paths; descriptions of learning outcomes; appropriate assessment and teaching methods...)
 - **Fostering employability** (labour market relevance of degrees through dialogue with labour market, combination of study and work placements etc.)
 - Making systems of HE **more inclusive**
 - Points at difficulties in implementation and demands more action
 - Strong focus on quality of education, **little reference to quality assurance**
 - QA one of the success stories of Bologna – only mishap the involvement of students
- Adoption of two central documents for QA:
 - the revised ESG
 - The European Approach to QA of Joint Programmes in the EHEA
 - (Also the ECTS users' guide revised version, now as an official Bologna document)

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Revision of the ESG - scope and contexts

- Focus on learning and teaching in higher education, including
 - Learning environment
 - Links to research and innovation
- The ESG are applicable to all types of HEIs and programmes, irrespective of mode of provision
- Institutions and agencies
 - Can have policies and processes for other activities beyond the scope of the ESG
 - Need to take account of their respective context when deciding how to implement the ESG

Part 1

Standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance within higher education institutions

Main Changes in Part 1

- Overall: make clear that **apply to all programmes** independently of mode or place of delivery (elearning, TNE...)
- High number of standards and many more guidelines than before: reflects the **focus on institutional responsibility** for quality and its assurance
- Some structural changes to make the standards follow more logically student “lifecycle”
- Move from “QA of teaching staff” to “development of teaching staff” to emphasise the importance of constant enhancement, not of once-for-all checking

Main changes in Part 1 – cont

- **Flexible learning central:** frequent reference to LLL, RPL, different delivery modes, diverse student body etc.
- **LOs and SCL have a strong focus**, and are mentioned in 5 out of the 10 standards!
 - 1.2: design of programmes, explicit reference to LOs, national QFs and QF-EHEA
 - 1.4: student admission and progression have a stronger focus than before and refer throughout to LOs based approach
 - 1.6: student support standard emphasis the diversity of the student population
- A new standard focusing altogether on student centered learning, teaching and assessment (1.3) → **requires a shift in thinking about “what is quality” in teaching and learning**. Headache for QABs and EQA! 😊
- The real question is: how will EQA support the implementation of these standards and monitor them? How can student-centeredness be translated into indicators? BUT: no longer an optional, but a “must do”!

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The European Approach to QA of Joint Programmes

- Main challenges for joint programmes: different, often incompatible and sometimes even contradictory QA process and criteria in different countries → a procedure in each country for its share (lack of understanding of the “whole” or agreement on a joint procedure case-by-case (very laboursome)?
- Common approach, that takes into account the joint nature of the programmes. One process on one set of (European) criteria to be accepted without further criteria by all involved countries as long as procedure done by an EQAR-listed agency (revolutionary!)
- Very strong focus on learning outcomes throughout the criteria (based on part 1 of the revised ESG) → focus on LO as a way to overcome a strong focus on national requirements related to input?
- Adopted on 14-15 May in Yerevan

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EQA – an opportunity or an obstacle?

- Strong focus on IQA, but... EQA has a role to play (builds on and supports the work of IQA)
- If done well, not only an extra demand but a real opportunity (for self-reflection, view “from the outside”, enhancement and improvement...)
- Obstacles posed (or perceived to be posed!) **by EQA on IQA** and institutions’ work
- Obstacles **to effective implementation of EQA** (attitudes, regulatory frameworks, unclear or complex division of tasks at the national level, lack of independence and the availability of high quality independent experts, etc.)

EQA – the opportunities

- **Good EQA systems...**

- support institutions in their IQA/quality enhancement processes (and build on them)
- provide institutions and programmes an opportunity to demonstrate quality (accountability)
- provide institutions and programmes an opportunity to self-reflection
- offer structured and reliable peer feedback

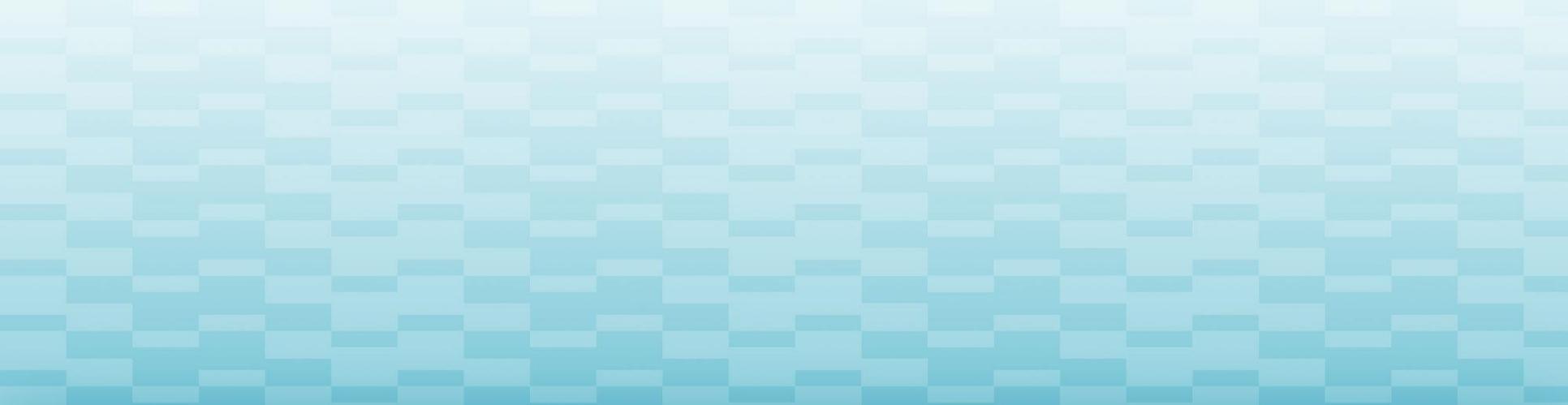
- offer a framework to support building of trust (quality is created by the HEIs, not the agencies, but how do we know?)
- provide guarantees to students and the society; ensure public funds are spent well by autonomous institutions (a tool for public accountability)
- ensure the involvement of stakeholders, at all levels (ESG)
- ensure a consistent approach to quality assurance across institutions (check on IQA)
- enable system-wide analysis and benchmarking; could facilitate exchange of good practice and peer-learning → very important in the shift to SCL!

EQA – watch out!

- Some obstacles created by (less than perfect) EQA:
 - Bureaucracy of processes may reduce will to participate (more a burden than a support)
 - May fail to build on or link to IQA → parallel and not concentric structures; worst case: not compatible or even contradictory
 - Is not able to demonstrate impact (no connection seen between EQA and the quality of teaching and learning!) → further reduced buy-in and effectiveness
- damaging to the quality assurance work also internally (quality assurance is something negative → how to create a quality culture?)
- EQA often not flexible, and better at maintaining status quo than in promoting innovation
- obstacle to joint programmes, interdisciplinary programmes, elearning (MOOCs!), internationalisation, cross-border HE, etc.
- Cannot “afford” this with the revised ESG which are filled with reference to flexible learning, SCL, and Los!

Making the most of EQA

- Strong involvement of stakeholders in EQA and willingness to “eat one’s own medicine” (constant improvement of EQA)
- Find ways to show (positive) impact of EQA on IQA and on quality
- Ensure that IQA and EQA are connected and work toward the same goals in a consistent (and not contradictory way)
- Ensure that EQA is “fit for purpose”, i.e. not overly burdening to institutions
- Support the creation of a quality (assurance) culture, where the importance of quality assurance will be accepted as an important element in constantly improving the education provision (and not as an external “control” or useless bureaucracy!)
- Experiment with and exchange good practice on more flexible approaches to QA that support rather than impede innovative provision of HE and can respond to current trends, and the requirements of the revised ESG



Thank you!

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