

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE EUROPEAN QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK

ANNA GOVER

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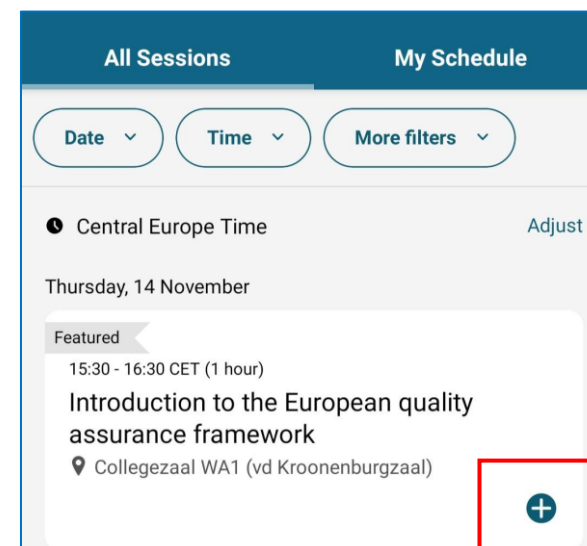
14 NOVEMBER 2024

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The European quality assurance framework

The **EHEA** was set up through the **Bologna Process** and is steering by the **BFUG**. **IQA** and **EQA** in line with the **ESG** is a key commitment of the Bologna Process. Primary authors of the ESG are the **E4 Group (ENQA, EUA, EURASHE and ESU)**. The same organisations are the founding members of **EQAR**. Bologna Process commitments include openness to **CBQA** and use of the **EA for QA of JPs**.



Bologna Process and the EHEA

- European QA is an integral part of the Bologna Process, since 1999 (QA a key commitment of the process, and a success story!)
- Process steered by the BFUG which prepares the ministerial conferences and implements the work plans
- Ministerial communiques set priorities and objectives for each working period
- And intergovernmental reform process to support interoperability, mobility, recognition, competitiveness
- Role of stakeholders is crucial

The E4 Group

enqa.

WESU EUROPEAN
STUDENTS'
UNION

eua EUROPEAN
UNIVERSITY
ASSOCIATION

EURASHE

The ESG

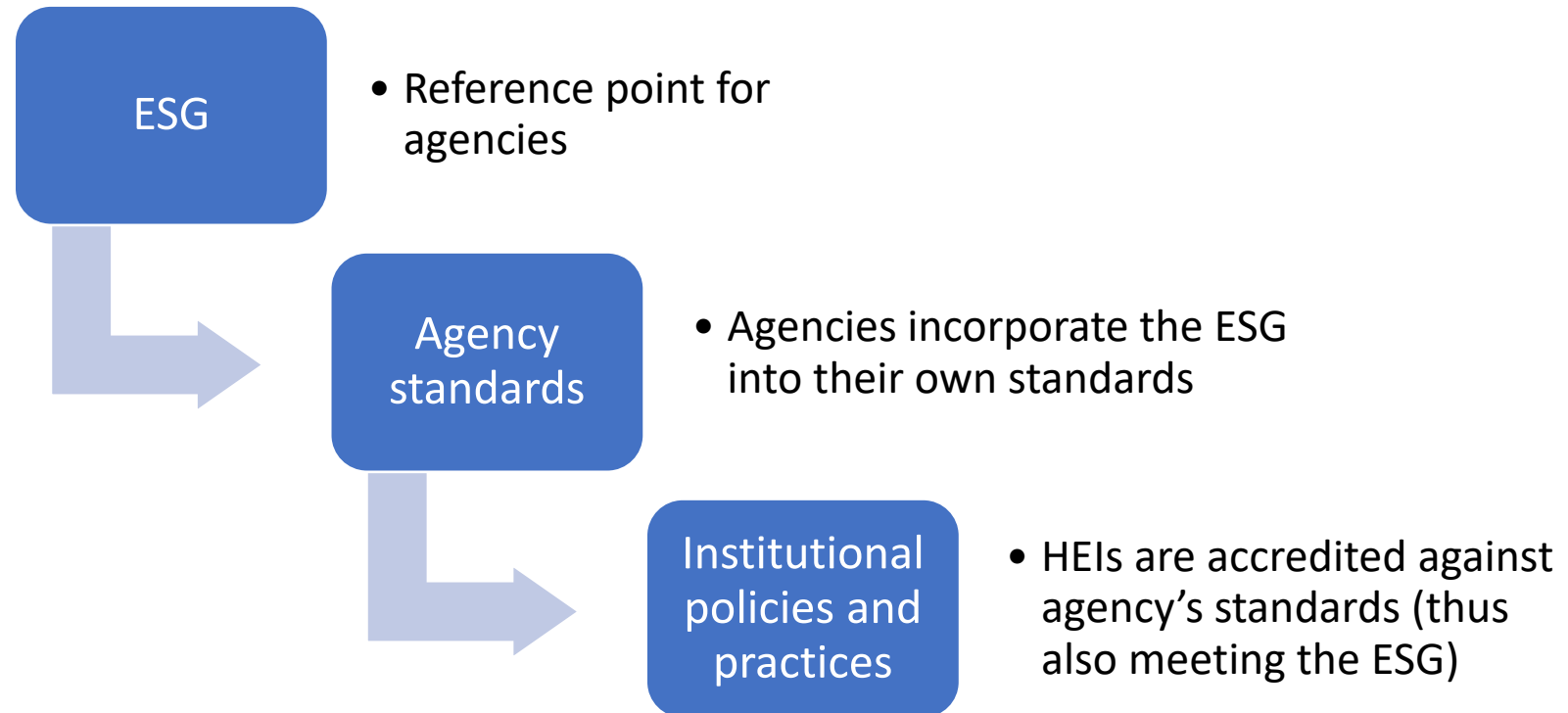
- Reference framework for agreed practice in QA in Europe
- **Introduction, followed by three parts:**
 - Internal QA within HEIs
 - External QA carried by QAAs
 - Internal QA within QAAs
- Focus on **quality assurance of higher education**
- **Principles for QA in the EHEA**
 - HEIs have primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance
 - QA responds to the diversity of higher education systems, institutions, programmes and students
 - QA supports the development of a quality culture
 - QA takes into account the needs and expectations of students, all other stakeholders and society



ESG 2027

- Mandate by Tirana ministerial conference – **deadline 2026, adoption 2027**
- Revision by the E4, with Education International, Business Europe and EQAR – co-drafting, negotiations, common ground and compromises → wide agreement and acceptance
- **Evolution and not a revolution**, based on needs of the sector and experiences from the use
- **A lot of balances to be found:**
 - between stakeholder expectations;
 - between guidance/interpretation and flexibility/diversity;
 - between minimum standards and quality enhancement;
 - focused or widened scope
 - use as policy implementation tool??
- **Topics:** sustainability, academic values, social dimension of HE, connecting institutional missions

ESG in practice



External quality assurance



Internal quality assurance

- Primary institutional responsibility for quality and assurance
- Emphasis on internal QA: ESG Part1 & shift towards institutional external QA in several systems in past 10 years
- Two main approaches to internal QA
 - aligned with strategic management: QA as a means to support the achievement of institutional goals
 - explicitly linked to defining and assessing the learning outcomes and ensuring these are aligned to the national qualification framework
- Quality culture the aim, yet remains challenging. Involvement of all stakeholders crucial
- Internal quality assurance to cover programmes (if external approach does not cover them) and should also explicitly cover micro-credentials

International cooperation in external QA

Joint programmes

- European Approach to Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (2015) (EAJP)
 - External QA based purely on criteria derived from the ESG Part 1
 - One exercise, by one EQAR listed agency - all countries involved recognise the results
 - Addresses challenges of external QA in countries with programme accreditation
- Challenges identified include external QA, in particular in countries with programme accreditation (incompatible criteria, double procedures etc.)
- 10 years after agreement: almost 20 countries do not allow systematically for its use!

Cross-border Quality Assurance (CBQA)

- QA agencies operating across borders
- HEIs can choose an agency that suits their profile from among EQAR-listed agencies
- Key considerations for Cross-border Quality Assurance by the E4 Group and EQAR

Underlying principle: cross-border recognition of decisions by EQAR-listed QA agencies

EU policy context

- Bologna Process (EHEA) – EU (EEA)
- Same framework but different activities, priorities, speeds?
- European Approach to Microcredentials and European Universities Initiative/Alliances
- European Commission “HE package” March 2024:
 - Sustainable careers (parity of esteem and international cooperation)
 - European Degree (label) and related criteria and approaches
 - European QA and recognition system (encourage institutional EQA)

Rely on (full implementation of) existing EHEA instruments: EAJP, QF-EHEA, ECTS, ESG and EQAR

What is EQAR?

- Founded 2008 by E4 organisations at Ministers' request
- Mission: enhancing trust and confidence in EHEA
- Main role: to manage a register of QA agencies that comply substantially with the ESG
- Complementary activities to maintaining the Register:
 - Monitoring status of legal frameworks for external QA in Europe
 - Monitoring cross-border QA developments
 - Database of external QA results by the registered agencies (DEQAR), now also including micro-credentials and alternative education providers

EQAR or ENQA?

Quality assurance agencies as members

EQAR or ENQA?

ENQA	EQAR
Members: EHEA QA agencies	Members: EHEA National governments and European stakeholder organisations
Acts in the interests of its members	Acts in the "public interest"
Main activities: Representation in policy making, support to members, development of QA, reviews of agencies, etc.	Main activity: manage a public official register of ESG compliant agencies Also: provide reliable public information on EQA

EQAR or ENQA?

Founded by the main European stakeholder organisations

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Members: EHEA QA agencies	Members: EHEA National governments and European stakeholder organisations
Founded by QA agencies (2000)	Founded by the E4, within the Bologna Process (2008)
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Grew alongside the Bologna Process; a consultative members of the Bologna Process	Born out of the Bologna Process (the first - and only - legal entity)

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ESG as criteria

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Some useful links

- [ESG 2015](#)
- [European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes](#)
- [Key considerations for cross-border QA](#)
- www.enqa.eu (external QA)
- www.eqar.eu (external QA, Register, DEQAR)
- www.eua.eu (internal QA, quality culture etc)
- www.eurashe.eu (internal QA with focus on professional HE)
- www.esu-online.org (student participation in QA)