



Thematic Peer Group C on Quality Assurance

Second Meeting, Online
30 November 2022

Minutes of meeting

List of Participants

Country	Name	Last Name
Albania	Xhiliola	Bixheku
Armenia	Varduhi	Gyulazyan
Azerbaijan	Ilham	Hümbətov
Belgium Flemish Community (Co-Chair)	Magalie	Soenen
Belgium Flemish Community	Liesbeth	Hens
Belgium Flemish Community	Mariëlle	van Heumen
Belgium Flemish Community (staff mobility host)	Patrick	Van den Bosch
Belgium Flemish Community (expert IMINQA project)	Kevin	Guillaume
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Maya	Macan
Croatia	Marina	C. Brečić
Cyprus	Ioannis	Kasoulides
Czech Republic	Tereza	Křepelová
EI-ETUCE	Karin	Āmossa
ENQA	Anna	Gover
EQAR	Melinda	Szabo
EQAR	Colin	Tück
ESU	Ana	Gvritishvili
EUA	Maria	Kelo
Finland	Helka	Kekäläinen
France	Solange	Pisarz
France	Sophie	Guillet
Germany	Katrin	Mayer-Lantermann
Greece	Christina	Besta
Iceland	Sigríður	Geirsdóttir
Ireland	Bryan	Maguire
Italy	Cecilia	Bibbò
Latvia	Jolanta	Silka
Lithuania	Almantas	Serpatauskas
Luxembourg	Patricia	Marx
Malta	Viktoriiia	Maltseva
Poland	Jakub	Brdulak
Poland	Jacek	Lewicki
Poland (staff mobility participant)	Ariadna	Strugielska
Romania (Co-Chair)	Daniela Cristina	Ghitulica
Romania (expert IMINQA project)	Romita	Iucu
Romania (expert IMINQA project)	Iordan	Petrescu
San Marino	Paola	Cenci
Slovenia	Maja	Milas
Sweden	Ulf	Hedbjörk
Switzerland	Laura	Beccari
United Kingdom (Scotland)	Alastair	Delaney
BFUG Secretariat	Patrik	Bardhi
BFUG Secretariat	Aida	Myrto
BFUG Secretariat	Enis	Fita

Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, EURASHE, European Commission, Georgia, Holy See, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, The Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Slovak Republic, Spain and Ukraine did not attend the meeting.

1. Welcome by the Co-Chairs of the TPG C on QA

The Co-Chairs welcomed all participants to the second online meeting of the Thematic Peer Group on Quality Assurance for the 2021-2024 work period. An outline of the agenda was provided, which was adopted without changes. All participants introduced themselves and their respective roles.

For more information, please see: [TPG C CZ KZ 2 Agenda](#)

2. General state-of-play and work plan of TPG C Country action plans, TPG meetings & Staff mobility

Magalie Soenen (Belgium / Flemish Community Co-Chair) requested the participants if they could review the Action Plan's present content. It was emphasized that five nations—Estonia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Spain, and Ukraine—still lacked the required information. Ms. Soenen informed that the subsequent TPG C meeting will take place in presence on the first and second of June 2023, in Kazakhstan. Then, a virtual meeting will take place later in 2023, followed by another physical meeting in Romania in May 2024 and one in Belgium in November 2024.

According to the staff mobility program, the TPG C members were informed that a call for applications was made in June 2022, with deadline on July 31st. The matchmaking committee then reviewed all the submissions and met in person in Belgium at the end of August. Staff mobilities started in October 2022 and will last until March 2023. On 30 May 2023, a matchmaking committee meeting will be held in Kazakhstan to review the observation reports.

Building on the previous work program's comparable staff mobility call, a number of countries submitted applications. 41 applications were received and 37 applications were selected. The applying countries' levels of QA implementation ranged from orange to dark green.

The second call for proposals will be announced in February 2023 with deadline at the end of March 2023. The matchmaking committee will evaluate the proposals in April 2023, and on May 30th, the proposals will be selected in the Kazakhstan matchmaking committee meeting. The announcement of the selection results will be made in early June 2023, in order for the staff mobilities to be held from June 2023 to February 2024. Each mobile staff member will need to submit a report on the mobility, at the latest one month after the end of the mobility. The hosts will also be asked to complete an optional report in order to offer additional input on the program.

For more information, please see: [TPG C on QA Update](#)

3. Experience from a staff mobility to 2024

Ariadna Strugielska (Poland) began by stating that one of the primary reasons for the Polish Accreditation Committee's application was the growing attractiveness of joint programs among Polish higher education institutions (HEIs). Moreover, she emphasized how the structure of that particular mobility allowed for the learning outcomes to be achieved.

One of the key objectives listed in the application form was the challenges with the implementation of the European Approach for quality assurance of joint programs, and so the mobility was focused on observing good practices and solutions. It was mentioned that among

the difficulties faced by many countries attempting to implement the European Approach are challenges with the recognition procedures and different decisions taken by various EQAR registered agencies.

Ms. Strugielska stressed that the most significant takeaway from the first meeting with EQAR and ENQA was that the European approach is flexible.

Another lesson learned was that there is no one universal method for the implementation of the European Approach, since accreditation agencies will likely have their own interpretations. Therefore, it is crucial that agencies at various levels share experiences in order to foster trust and improve understanding.

Patrick Van den Bosch thanked Ms. Strugielska and contributed with a few brief observations from the perspective of a host. He emphasized on the same findings on the European Approach process. He provided input to his counterparts, but certain issues were discovered through mutual learning. He also underlined that combination of physical mobility and an online component is an added value. It was affirmed that while the European Approach is recognised as an evaluation framework for the EHEA, there will always be variations based on cultural identity and the background of coordination amongst quality assurance bodies. Reiterating that the mobilities will continue in the upcoming months, he stressed how important it was to maintain communication and build a sense of mutual trust. Additionally, it would be beneficial to combine several quality assurance organizations or ministries so that they could exchange information. Nevertheless, he advised against attending the site visits with more observers than panel members.

4. Digitalization of QA processes

Jordan Petrescu (Romania) highlighted some of the documented concepts about the use of digital technologies in quality assurance procedures and the degree to which those concepts have been implemented by Quality Assurance Agencies (QAAs). He stated that the majority of quality assurance activities at the level of QAAs are currently in the development phase in what it concerns digitalization,

Mr. Petrescu noted that it is possible to build a standardized quality assurance workflow and minimize costs due to the automated database and networked quality assurance. At the same time, he noted that from the point of view of the accreditation agency digitalising quality assurance processes results in a need for more employees, technical and financial resources. A mapping of activities undertaken by QA agencies in the EHEA and presenting the degree of digitalization of QA processes and practices will be carried out.

The first draft of the survey will be ready in January 2023. It was asked if it was possible to establish some sort of integrated campus for the European University Alliance where the development of digital and IT is particularly important, however it was informed that the project will not focus on this. Another member stated that in their case (Poland), external experts worked directly within the university platform, and the agency also managed all processes through the E-system, which will be expanded for other types of assessments in the future. Mr. Petrescu expressed appreciation for the input, which will benefit in creating the survey, as it is crucial to consider how to phrase the inquiries and what sort of response to anticipate.

The Co-Chairs thanked everyone for their contributions, adding that at the subsequent meeting, they will go into further detail about the topic and update the members on the work's next developments.

5. Peer learning activities

Melinda Szabo (EQAR) provided an overview on the Peer Learning Activities (PLAs) as part of the workplan of the TPG and within the IMINQA project. The first PLA took place in Brussels on

September 2022 and focused on the alignment of the national legal frameworks with the ESG. The second PLA will take place on 21 March 2023 in Romania, with focus on cross border QA and QA of transnational education. The third PLA will be held in Belgium with focus on the European Approach of QA of joint programs. It was highlighted that the PLAs include a preparatory note based on existing analyses, data and reports, followed by a thematic analysis that will feed into the cross-cutting report.

An overview of the first PLA's format was provided: one-day with three parallel sessions on specific topics including the national legal frameworks, ESG compliance and status/role of external QA. The perspectives of Slovakia, Italy and Sweden, as well as the developments and initiatives of each country in the area of QA were discussed and examined. From this PLA, a thematic analysis would be created and shared with the countries, allowing those who couldn't attend to contribute and provide further insight.

It was noted that 29 out of 47 HE systems currently satisfy the requirement of having all HEIs subject to regular review against the ESG, carried out by an EQAR-registered agency. Outcomes of the PLA on the topics covered included the following:

- Topic 1 on legal framework: Due to the strong control-based approaches in external QA, there is a need for HEIs and QA bodies to have more autonomy when designing their QA processes. Additionally, it was advised that legal safeguards TO be provided for the independence of the QA agency and that the legal framework to be made somewhat more flexible.
- Topic 2 on ESG compliance: There are issues in terms of involvement of students in review panels and ensuring representation of stakeholders in agency's governance. There is a need to introduce separate appeals and complaints processes, and a systematic approach in producing thematic analyses.
- Topic 3 on status/role of external QA: On the relevance of external QA, a shift was noted in some countries (i.e., Sweden) that are introducing more innovative solutions and approaches. Additionally, it was emphasized as crucial to balance the invested efforts while taking into account the increased value of each external QA procedure.

For the upcoming PLA, the focus will be placed on what extent EHEA members allow their HEIs to use a suitable EQAR-registered agency for their mandatory external QA. Topics to be explored will include cross-border QA from a HEI perspective, from a registered QA agency perspective, as well as QA of Transnational Education.

Collaboration between the ministry and the QA agency was emphasized as essential when tackling some of the aforementioned difficulties. It was also highlighted as being extremely beneficial to meet representatives of various countries during these PLAs to discuss and share best practices, particularly on topics on how, if there are any countries doing so, to align the activities between the ministry and QA agencies in a more effective way.

6. QA of micro-credentials

Anna Gover (ENQA) presented an overview of the aim and activities of the Working Group on QA on micro-credentials, in order to expand on the work and findings of the Microbol project and develop useful tools for QA of micro-credentials.

The first WG meeting was held in September 2022, with the aim to go over the outcomes of previous work and discuss the key issues, experiences and expectations around both internal and external QA of micro-credentials. Four writing groups have been formed to work on desk research, internal and external QA guidance and key consideration for non-HEI providers. In terms of desk research, there has been a survey distributed to the TPG C members with the

aim of mapping the state of play of policy developments, as well as collect data about different activities and initiatives related to QA of micro-credentials in the EHEA. The desk research would then be presented and discussed in the upcoming TPG C meeting in June.

Coordination with other TPGs is ongoing in order to prevent duplication of work and to create a common document that incorporates the findings of all TPGs and offers HEIs practical guidance on the entire life cycle of micro-credentials.

7. QA of European Universities

Magalie Soenen (Co-Chair) provided an overview of the first online meeting of the Working Group on QA of European Universities, held in June 2022, to outline the WG's activities and goals, discuss the current situation and challenges in participating countries, and introduce the framework of the EUniQ project.

The main outcomes included that, considering having different types of alliances, there is the need to establish a framework to support all such alliances and provide a procedure that avoids contradictory processes in different countries. Discussions on whether the framework should somewhat replace a national institutional approach were also held. It was also discussed that an overall framework cannot be implemented in all countries due to different national legislations and requirements, thus it was noted that at this moment it could only be a voluntary assessment with the aim of enhancing the QA procedures within the alliance. Further, it was noted that social inclusion and access to HE should be emphasized in such a framework.

The next stage will be to analyze the legislative barriers to systems in the WG-participating countries with EQAR's support. An in-presence meeting will be held in Brussels in January 2023 to present the analysis and launch a call for countries to take part in a more comprehensive study under the Implementation and Innovation in Quality Assurance through Peer Learning (IMINQA) umbrella project. For these countries, an online PLA will be held in March 2023, and a physical PLA in November 2023. Also in November 2023, another WG meeting is anticipated to take place in Brussels.

Melinda Szabo (EQAR) added that, in addition to the desk research, a form of SWOT analysis was being considered to be developed. However, it was noted that this depends on the agreement within the group on how to proceed forward. At this stage, everyone is invited to express their position and then the working group will move forward with the most suitable option.

A remark was made to not overlap the work between the WG on European Universities Alliances and the PLAs on cross-border QA and European approach of joint programs. In addition, it was underlined that considerations should be given on how to ensure that the EUniQ project framework is advanced, as it is absent from all of the policy documents developed by the European Commission, from the Rome Communiqué, and from discussions in the BFUG. As a result, the WG could put forward a proposal to the BFUG that the framework be presented as an official document of the EHEA.

8. Discussion on the new (social dimension) indicators and the role of the QAA

Anna Gover (ENQA) presented an outline of the social dimension of higher education and the role of external QA. She specifically noted that the WG on Social Dimension (SD) is working on the development of a European policy monitoring framework for social dimension of HE. Moreover, the WG is currently working on a more concrete implementation framework that includes developing indicators for the Principles and Guidelines to strengthen the social dimension of HE. During 2021-2022, in cooperation with the WG on SD, Eurydice developed indicators for the principles of social dimension. Consequently, the WG on SD adopted the

majority of indicators from Eurydice and, when needed, adapted them. An outline of the proposed indicators was given, pointing out that each indicator has been designed as a statement to allow public authorities to operationalize each principle. Additionally, a number of indicators that specifically concerned QA were highlighted. Ms. Gover emphasized that certain indicators call for QAAs to provide some sort of monitoring (i.e., checking to see if HEIs have social dimension strategies or policies in place; providing different types of counseling and guidance services). She continued by stressing that many of the issues that are covered are linked with the ESG Part 1, including student-centered learning, recognition and diverse student population.

Ms. Gover continued by focusing on the work done by the WG on Fundamental Values (FV), there is a number of references to what sort of expectations could be put towards QAAs when it comes to playing a role in monitoring fundamental values such as academic freedom or institutional autonomy. In relation to the BPIR, a summary of the work done by the WG on Monitoring was given, along with an outline of the chapters that will be included and the indicators that will be used in the next edition of the report.

Concern was expressed on the burden that is being or will be placed on QAAs, particularly given that agencies have very different limits and scopes depending on their position within their HE system. As many of the indicators go beyond the scope of the ESG, a distinction should be established between what are the requirements and what the agencies are being examined against when they have an external review, and what is considered as additional guidance for QA. The vast number of indicators being produced by these WGs was also mentioned, stressing the need to lead to meaningful change and impact.

In order for the Co-Chairs to put together some comments and contributions to present to the different BFUG WGs, the Co-Chairs would send the documents to the TPG members and ask them to share their opinions on the indicators. It was also underlined that while numerous monitoring frameworks and indicators are now being developed, caution should be taken to avoid moving toward more QA processes and more indicators. Instead, greater focus should be given to ensuring that the QA processes run more seamlessly and efficiently.

The topic of whether QAAs are tackling SD and FV issues on a national level, as well as whether these issues fall under the scope of the QAAs was brought up for discussion. In the case of Sweden, it was stated that the development of a large number of principles and indicators, focused on widening participation, and may not be within the scope of some QAAs, it could overburden QA processes. It was also mentioned that, in principle, incorporating transversal issues into the QA framework has been challenging. However, one method of approaching this involved conducting a thematic analysis on widening access. The thematic analysis provide input to all HEIs, it was stated, but the main goal is to provide the overall national picture and serve as a starting point for peer learning both within the ministry and between the ministry, HEIs, and other stakeholders. Additionally, it was noted that efforts are being made to lessen the number of indicators utilized in the QA frameworks, a task that has proven challenging.

In the case of Ireland, it was underlined as crucial to understand what is included in the scope of the ESG and what not. It was noted that some of these indicators are not necessarily in the scope of ESG. In the Irish experience in particular, the question of equity or equality of participation in HE is a specific statutory function of the agency responsible for the funding, planning and strategic direction of the HE and HE authorities. And so, in the division of attributions of public authorities, they cover the ways in which institutions have targets and the way that these targets are evaluated and incorporated in national policies. And thus, QAAs have not expanded their functions to cover this. In order to address the matter, it was recommended that instead of placing the evaluation as an express duty on the QAA, for some of the indicators, a Public Authority who may also include a QAA would conduct the assessment.

Regarding QA at the European level and the ESG, there was one point of agreement: the indicators go beyond this and are of a more exploratory nature. Additionally, it was discovered that certain QAAs go above and beyond what is only requested of them by the ESG. It is important to know that other things are occurring at the country level, thus the question to consider is who else is conducting quality assurance inside the country in addition to the QAAs. In order to better understand what is happening in other areas, it was also emphasized as being crucial to draw a distinction between the monitoring of key commitments and the exploratory or mapping approach. After the meeting, the members were invited to give any additional comments or input on this subject to be shared with the other BFUG WGs.

For more information, please see: [Discussion on the new social dimension indicators and the role of the QA agencies](#)

9. Synergies with other projects in the field of QA

9.1. Quality Assurance Fit for the Future (QA-FIT)

Anna Gover (ENQA) encouraged members to respond to the surveys that were distributed to the QAAs by ENQA and to the ministries by EQAR. Similar surveys have recently been made available to HEIs via EUA and EURASHE, as well as to students via ESU. The goal of these surveys is to perform a thorough mapping of the current state of QA in terms of ESG and beyond, as well as to explore QA in general and the broader concerns that are related to QA, such as SD and FV. Members were also encouraged to approach their respective institutions and organizations, and request that this survey be completed.

9.2. Supporting European QA Agencies in meeting the ESG- round 2 (SEQA-ESG2)

Ms. Gover further elaborated on the SEQA-ESG2 project, that is coordinated by ENQA, to support the QAAs in meeting the expectations of the ESG. She reported that the project's first phase, which included ministries and agencies from Albania, the Czech Republic, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro and Slovakia, had just been finished. The project has been very successful, yielding concrete results that can already be seen in the system and in the QAAs involved, with some of the latter currently receiving their first external assessment against the ESG. The main conclusions of the project were discussed in a webinar that took place last week; and the recording is available on the ENQA website. In early 2023, a second phase of the project will begin, with Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Ukraine taking part.

9.3. Bologna with Stakeholders Eyes for an Innovative, Inclusive and Interconnected EHEA by 2030 (BWSE FOR2030)

Ana Gvritshvili (ESU) emphasized that the project outcomes were shared in May 2022 and noted that one of ESU's top priorities was to involve stakeholders in the advancement of QA. The survey, which will cover facets of QA and involve as many students as possible, will soon be developed. This item will remain on the agenda of the following meeting in order to receive further updates from ESU.

10. Next steps

Magalie Soenen (Co-Chair) highlighted that the next meeting will be held in-presence in Kazakhstan, and there will be partial reimbursement for the participants. More information on the programme and practical information would be sent in spring 2023. It was reiterated that a second call within the Staff Mobility Program will be shared in February 2023 and that mobilities will be possible between June 2023 to February 2024. The list of forthcoming PLAs was also mentioned, and the members were encouraged to take part in these events as part

of their commitment with the TPG C. Additionally, specific WG activities were emphasized, such as future meetings and the completion of the surveys.

The presentations would be published on the EHEA website, and discussions on how to upgrade the TPG C webpage to include more specific information on upcoming events, news, and updates would be held with the BFUG Secretariat.

No other issues were raised, thus the second TPG C meeting was concluded with thanks to the Co-Chairs for a successful organization of the meeting and to the members for their contributions.