ENQA report to the BFUG on 25 June 2020

1. ENQA's response to COVID-19

Together with the higher education sector and society as a whole, quality assurance agencies are facing unprecedented disruption to their normal activities, continued uncertainty as to the duration of the current lockdown measures, as well as speculation around the possible long term impact on our daily work. This situation has promoted reflections on the future of higher education in general, and quality assurance in particular in the ENQA community. While the future remains uncertain, ENQA has taken some specific actions to support its members during these exceptional times.

ENQA membership and external reviews

ENQA continues to coordinate external reviews of agencies. Most reviews planned for spring 2020 have been postponed to the autumn, or moved online. Together with EQAR, ENQA has informed and reassured its members that no agency will jeopardise their ESG compliance if they adapt their procedures due to the current circumstances for the duration of lockdown measures. The postponement of review processes or transfer to online processes in this situation is fully permissible under the ESG and ENQA has encouraged its members to offer flexibility for higher education institutions in this regard. ENQA is acutely aware that while some challenges in this respect are common across many agencies, others are unique and reflect the specific operating context of each individual agency. ENQA has therefore strongly encouraged agencies to maintain a dialogue with institutions and national authorities in order to address any national level issues that may hinder this flexibility, such as legal restrictions related to site visits or timing of reviews.

Learning from each other

Feedback from our members reiterated the important role that ENQA has to play in the current circumstances by offering a forum to share experiences and learn from each other. To facilitate this, on 20 May ENQA organised **a webinar** exploring the strategic aspects of how to deal with the consequences of the pandemic for the CEOs of its member and affiliate agencies. In addition, a specific practice-oriented webinar on online site visits was organised on 16 June. The recording of the latter will be made available here: https://enqa.eu/index.php/events-2/webinar-videos/. ENQA has also published **a collection of case studies on agencies' responses** to the pandemic on the ENQA website (https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/External-QA-in-times-of-COVID-

[19_case-examples.pdf](), in order to facilitate sharing of good practice. The document will be updated regularly as new examples are collected. ENQA has also invited its members to share their experience via social media channels using #QAfromHome.

ENQA is exploring the options for a more detailed survey and analysis of pandemic responses by agencies, to be conducted in the autumn. The aim of this will be to reflect on the short term changes that were made and the lessons learnt, as well as to explore perspectives on the possible long term impact. This will however take some time, as the priority is now to give some space and time to the agencies to adjust their work and provide much needed support in their own contexts to institutions and other higher education stakeholders.

2. New project to support agencies in six EHEA countries

ENQA is leading a new project, "Supporting European QA Agencies in meeting the ESG (SEQA-ESG)", which is to support quality assurance (QA) agencies and national authorities in six EHEA countries (Albania, the Czech Republic, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, and Slovakia) to create an ESG-compliant QA system, which is one of the Bologna Process key commitments.

More specifically, the project aims to achieve: 1) legal frameworks in line with the ESG; 2) alignment of the QA processes to the ESG peer-review method; 3) connection of national criteria with the ESG; 4) appropriate methods and criteria for the involvement of peer reviewers; and 5) meaningful stakeholder involvement in external QA. To reach the objectives, the following activities are foreseen in the project:

1) **Peer counselling** in the six countries, gathering national authorities, the agency and key stakeholders. The key outcome of the activity is a national action plan for QA development.
2) **Peer support workshops** on four key themes (QA methodology, QA criteria, review experts and stakeholders).
3) **Staff exchanges** between agencies, with multiplier presentations upon return.
4) Creation of **agency action plans** for a review against the ESG.

The activities are designed to address different needs appropriately, both at the legal framework level as well as within the agencies and ensure that the six countries make fast progress in achieving ESG compliance. The project started on 1st June 2020 and will last for two full years. It involves ENQA as the coordinator and partners from each of the six countries, including QA agencies and national ministries in charge of higher education. The project is co-funded by the European Commission under EPLUS-2019-09-EHEA – Initiatives to support the implementation of European Higher Education Area (EHEA) reforms. More information on the project will be available here: https://enqa.eu/index.php/supporting-european-qa-agencies-in-meeting-the-esg-seqa-esg/

3. 20 years of ENQA in 2020

Founded in 2000, ENQA celebrates its 20th anniversary in 2020. Compliance with the ESG 2015, as demonstrated by an external review, has determined the current composition of ENQA, which now includes 55 member agencies from 31 countries in the EHEA. In addition to its members, ENQA's work is supported by its affiliates, which account for another 57 bodies with interest in quality assurance operating within Europe, East Asia, the Middle East, and the Americas. **All in all ENQA**

represents organisations in 44 of the 48 EHEA countries. ENQA continues to collaborate with QA agencies not yet able to demonstrate compliance with the ESG, an effort aided by a newly launched project providing specific and targeted support to agencies in six EHEA countries which do not yet have an ESG compliant QA agency to achieve this as soon as possible (see point 2 above).

The increased interest towards ENQA by quality assurance networks in other world regions, as well as of individual agencies outside the EHEA, is a testimony to the success of the European approach to quality assurance of higher education. In addition, through several international projects, ENQA has continued to support the development of external quality assurance outside the EHEA, including support for regional quality assurance frameworks in the ASEAN, in Africa and – most recently – in Latin America fostering thus inter-regional dialogue in the field of quality assurance.

It is fair to say that ENQA has grown together with the Bologna process, where ENQA's origin and mission are firmly rooted. 20 years is a short time in terms of World history but quite a long time in the framework of the Bologna Process. From this perspective, the speed, depth and width of developments in (external) QA in such a relatively short period of time have been remarkable. Things that were heatedly debated 10, 15 or 20 years ago are now considered as well established basic characteristics of European quality assurance systems (despite not being fully implemented all across the EHEA yet): the independence of QA agencies; the primary responsibility of institutions for quality and quality assurance; the double purpose of accountability and enhancement; the transparency of QA results, including the publication of reports; and the role of stakeholders, in particular of students, in these processes, and so on. ENQA remains committed to the common European agenda for higher education reforms and the important work carried out within the Bologna Process. We hope that we can continue to support the achievement of reliable, fit-for-purpose quality assurance frameworks in all 48 EHEA countries, supporting thus achievement of agreed minimum standards, constant quality enhancement, and innovation in quality assurance in the coming years.