EXTRACT FROM THE ENQA MESSAGE
TO MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE EHEA

Paris Ministerial Conference, May 2018

The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) is pleased to report several positive developments relating to the priorities and commitments mentioned in the communiqué of the last ministerial meeting in Yerevan.

Since 2015, 21 quality assurance (QA) agencies have undergone an external review against the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG 2015)[1] in order to seek ENQA membership. ENQA welcomed three new members from EHEA countries not previously represented – Armenia, Greece, and Kazakhstan – an indication of the continued commitment to the shared goals of the Bologna Process. Considering these new additions, QA agencies from 28 of the EHEA's 48 member states have demonstrated compliance with the ESG and have been granted ENQA membership. ENQA continues to collaborate with QA agencies not yet able to demonstrate compliance with the ESG, an effort aided by ENQA's contribution to the activities of the "Enhancing Quality through Innovative Policy and Practice (EQUIP)" project, which have included focus groups, webinars, and studies to help QA agencies and higher education institutions overcome implementation challenges related to the ESG 2015.

The external review reports demonstrate diversity in QA agencies' approaches to quality assurance and a continued commitment to enhancement in the field. The reviews have also indicated increasing complexity of QA agencies' structures and a widening scope of their activities. For instance, several QA agencies have faced mergers with other similar agencies in their national context, thus gaining additional tasks and new challenges. At the same time, the systematic professionalisation of quality assurance has resulted in an increased level of maturity among QA agencies and a greater capacity for them to support higher education institutions in improving their internal quality assurance procedures and to encourage the growth of a quality culture. ENQA's support function in this area has included publishing the *ENQA Quality Assurance Professional Competencies Framework*[2], a framework that QA agencies may use in job design, recruitment, and staff development and the *Handbook for Internal Quality Management in Competence-Based Education*[3], which details a procedure designed within the "Internal Quality Management in Competence-Based Higher Education (IQM-HE)" project to help higher education institutions reflect on the best way to implement an internal quality management system.

In line with the ministers' commitment to enable higher education institutions to use a suitable EQAR-registered agency for their external quality assurance process and realising that further facilitation was necessary to guide stakeholders engaging in cross-border quality assurance, ENQA – in cooperation with the E4 Group and EQAR – published the document *Key considerations for Cross Border Quality Assurance*[4]. Reaffirming that the ESG are the basis for all quality assurance in the EHEA, the document aims to provide information and support to higher education institutions and QA agencies that engage in or are considering engaging in cross-border quality assurance activities.

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[1] Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2015). Available at: http://www.enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg/

[2] ENQA Quality Assurance Professional Competencies Framework (2016). Available at: http://www.enqa.eu/indirme/papers-and-reports/occasional-papers/ENQA%20Competencies%20Framework.pdf

[3] Handbook for Internal Quality Management in Competence-Based Education (2016). Available at: https://iqmhe.files.wordpress.com/2016/11/iqm-he-handbook.pdf

[4] Key Considerations for Cross-Border Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2017). Available at: http://www.enqa.eu/indirme/papers-and-reports/associated-reports/Key-Considerations-CBQA-EHEA.pdf

In order to further support the ministers' priority to develop more effective policies for the recognition of credits gained abroad, of qualifications for academic and professional purposes, and of prior learning, ENQA established a working group on the subject, which explored the relevant current practices of QA agencies. Work in this area continues within the "Linking Academic Recognition and Quality Assurance (LIREQA)" project, which has brought together communities of credential evaluators, quality assurance specialists, and higher education institutions to create a set of recommendations to address fair recognition of qualifications and to build the capacity of ENIC-NARIC centres, QA agencies, and higher education institutions.

ENQA has also taken up several activities relating to quality assurance and the ministers' priorities in the areas of student-centred learning, digital technologies, and the improved preparation of graduates for entry into the labour market. In addition, through several international projects, ENQA has supported the development of external quality assurance outside the EHEA, including support for regional quality assurance frameworks in the ASEAN and in Africa.