**First Meeting of the EHEA Working Group on Structural Reform (13-14 December 2012, Brussels)**

**Outline of the breakout session on quality assurance**

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(ENQA)

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(The Netherlands)

**Purpose and background**

The main purpose of the breakout session will be to identify the most important issues related to Quality Assurance which should be covered with the WG activities. Discussion should focus not only on issues related to Quality Assurance as such, but also on its links with other main areas of the Structural Reforms as well as with transversal issues and general developments in Higher Education policies.

Key issues can be derived from the Communique, the Strategy “Mobility for better Learning”, and the Bologna Policy Forum Statement (relevant parts of the Bucharest documents are presented in the appendix). In contrary to QF, recognition and transparency there was no working group dedicated to Quality Assurance in the Work Plan 2009-2012. However the final report from the “Mapping the Implementation and Application of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (MAP-ESG)”[[1]](#footnote-1) project and its conclusions are also good food for thought for our discussions.

**Key issues**

**Taking into account the background documents, summaries prepared by some WG members and general developments in the area of Quality Assurance, the following issues should be necessarily addressed by the Working Group:**

* Developments in QA needed in order to improve coherent implementation of Bologna reforms, help QFs and learning outcomes work in practice, facilitate recognition of qualification as well as better fulfill the societal needs of making informed decisions. How the “Bologna Triangle: QF-QA-Recognition” works? How the attainment of learning outcomes is included in assessment procedures?
* Revision of the European Standard and Guidelines in order to improve their clarity, applicability and usefulness, including their scope. (as appropriate, without prejudice to general responsibility of the Steering Group – E4 + EI, BUSINESSEUROPE, EQAR - for preparing the initial proposal).
* Raising the level of EQAR’s recognition in national legislation across EHEA as well as in the context of cooperation worldwide, mainly in order to improve mutual trust between national HE systems. Consequences of a functioning register for Quality Assurance.
* A need to ensure quality while addressing dilemmas of mass higher education in the light of the priority defined in the Bucharest Communique “Providing quality higher education for all”. Diversification of HE systems and their offerings as a challenge for QA.
* Quality assurance in Joint Programmes.
* Relations between Quality Assurance in HE and the logics of a market.

Participants can obviously tackle other topics and the breakout session can define them as the issues that need to be addressed by the Working Group. The following issues might be considered:

* Quality assurance and franchise education.
* Diversified and constantly changing approach to the issue of quality in EHEA.
* Relations between quality and relevance, especially in the context of employability.
* Quality assurance in Life-long Learning and Recognition of Prior Learning.
* Countering low quality and fraud in Higher Education.
* The role of competition and shift towards demonstrating quality and good “performance”, also in the light of performance-based funding schemes spreading across Europe. (this question is relevant also, if not mainly, for the transparency breakout session).
* Raising pressure for demonstrating evidence-based quality of national Higher Education systems which should be defined with different terms than the quality of individual institutions. (this question is relevant also, if not mainly, for the transparency breakout session).

**Outline of the session**

The breakout session is planned for 2 hours. It should start with a brief introduction by the chair who should outline the main purpose of the session. This should be followed with the presentation by the facilitator which shall last approximately 15 minutes.

The breakout session aims first of all for giving participants an opportunity for discussion and this should be the main part of the session. Discussion can be divided into a few rounds, first devoted to the general reflection of the participants and further ones focused on certain key issues.

At the end of the session the rapporteur will present the main conclusions from the session.

**APPENDIX: Relevant parts of the Bucharest Communique, the Mobility Strategy and the Bologna Policy Forum Statement.**

***[on Quality Assurance, p 2]***

**Quality assurance is essential for building trust and to reinforce the attractiveness of the EHEA’s offerings, including in the provision of cross-border education.** We commit to both maintaining the public responsibility for quality assurance and to actively involve a wide range of stakeholders in this development. We acknowledge the ENQA, ESU, EUA and EURASHE (the E4 group) report on the implementation and application of the “European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance” (ESG). **We will revise the ESG to improve their clarity, applicability and usefulness, including their scope.** The revision will be based upon an initial proposal to be prepared by the E4 in cooperation with Education International, BUSINESSEUROPE and the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), which will be submitted to the Bologna Follow-Up Group.

We welcome the external evaluation of EQAR and we encourage quality assurance agencies to apply for registration. **We will allow EQAR-registered agencies to perform their activities across the EHEA, while complying with national requirements. In particular, we will aim to recognise quality assurance decisions of EQAR-registered agencies on joint and double degree programmes.**

***[on learning outcomes, p. 3]***

To consolidate the EHEA, meaningful implementation of learning outcomes is needed. **The development, understanding and practical use of learning outcomes is crucial to the success of ECTS, the Diploma Supplement, recognition, qualifications frameworks and quality assurance – all of which are interdependent.** **We call on institutions** to further link study credits with both learning outcomes and student workload, and **to include the attainment of learning outcomes in assessment procedures.** We will work to ensure that the ECTS Users’ Guide fully reflects the state of on-going work on learning outcomes and recognition of prior learning.

***[on recognition, p. 4]***

We welcome the European Area of Recognition (EAR) Manual and recommend its use as a set of guidelines for recognition of foreign qualifications and a compendium of good practices, as well as encourage higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies to assess institutional recognition procedures in internal and external quality assurance.

***[on coherent implementation of Structural reforms, p. 1]***

We will strive for more coherence between our policies, especially in completing the transition to the three cycle system, the use of ECTS credits, the issuing of Diploma Supplements, the enhancement of quality assurance and the implementation of qualifications frameworks, including the definition and evaluation of learning outcomes.

***[on priorities at national level, p.5]***

Allow EQAR-registered quality assurance agencies to perform their activities across the EHEA, while complying with national requirements;

***[on priorities at European level, p. 5]***

Develop a proposal for a revised version of the ESG for adoption;

***[on mobility, the EHEA Strategy “Mobility for better learning”, p. 3,4]***

**6. We will use quality assurance and transparency tools for promoting high quality mobility inside and outside the EHEA.**

Transparency of structures and instruments and mutual trust in the higher education systems of all the EHEA countries are at the core of the EHEA and a necessary prerequisite for mobility. **We further encourage the application of the qualifications framework for the EHEA, of the ECTS and of the Diploma Supplement and intend to strengthen the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) by using the register better as a reference instrument especially by deploying the quality assurance agencies listed in it consistently in the respective member countries.**

Furthermore, in accrediting or recognising study programmes we must pay even greater attention to ensuring that the professional perspectives opened up by a study programme are clearly set out. We aim to facilitate the alignment of EU legislation on professional qualifications with the EHEA (e.g. reference to learning outcomes, promoting even greater comparability in the use of ECTS as the basis for such recognition). We request the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) to engage in a dialogue with the European Commission and the national authorities responsible for professional qualifications in order to establish effective cooperation to this end. In addition, we ask the BFUG to explore the feasibility of entrusting agencies registered in the EQAR with the assessment of the conformity of regulated qualifications.

We also seek dialogue with other parts of the world and suggest more intensive collaboration in the field of quality assurance with regions outside Europe. We call on the networks active in this field to investigate the possibility of establishing greater transparency and better reciprocal understanding of already existing quality assurance procedures with countries or regions outside Europe. **Worldwide collaboration in quality assurance can also be intensified by more quality assurance agencies from outside Europe being included in the EQAR on the basis of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG).**

***[On global dimension, BPF Statement, p. 2]***

Global and regional approaches to quality enhancement of higher education. In the current international context, we particularly underline the importance of quality assurance. We consider it both a tool to strengthen the capacity of higher education institutions to enhance the quality of provision and an instrument to promote transparency and trust.

We support the conclusion of the international conference on quality assurance co-organised by the Flemish Government and the European Commission in December 2011. Despite the fact that different regions and countries have developed different approaches to quality assurance, we have similar challenges and interests. We can therefore benefit by working towards solutions which, although they have to be adapted to our own contexts, can share a common basis.

We aim to further develop robust and functional quality assurance systems and to promote cooperation between them. **We also stress the important role of qualification frameworks and quality assurance in facilitating the recognition of qualifications and international mobility.**

1. <http://www.enqa.eu/files/op_17_web.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)