

Quality Assurance of Cross-Border Higher Education - Results of the QACHE project

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Quality Assurance of Cross-Border Higher Education (QACHE)

- Co-Financing: Erasmus Mundus Programme of the European Union
- Oct 2013 - March 2016
- Partners: ENQA (co-ordinator), ANECA (Spain), GAC (Germany), HCERES (France), QAA (UK), TEQSA (Australia)
- APQN (Asia-Pacific) and ANQAHE (Arab Network)
- Main aims: enhance international practice in the QA of CBHE, develop an European approach to the QA of CBHE

Project phases

Phase 1 – Information gathering

- Regional networks surveys (ENQA, APQN, ANQAHE)
- European providers survey (SP, DE, FR, UK)
- Country reports (ES, DE, FR, UK, AU)

Phase 2 – Regional expert forums

- Europe (London, UK), Gulf (Manama, Bahrain), Asia (Macao, China)

Phase 3 – Main outputs

- Final report
- **Toolkit**

Cross-border higher education is:

‘education in which the learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based’

UNESCO/Council of Europe 2001 *Code of Good Practice in the provision of transnational education*

What did we learn?

- CBHE is a global phenomenon that can cover several aspects:
- Double/joint programmes
- Offshore campuses
- Networks
- Mergers
- Virtual education
- Many others (expansion and development)



What did we learn?

Phase 1: information gathering

Regulation of and information about CBHE is patchy:

- Absence of a common approach to CBHE
- Absence of developed QA systems for CBHE
- Absence of comprehensive data about CBHE
- Lack of reciprocal understanding by sending & host countries of each other's QA frameworks

What did we learn?

Phase 1: information gathering

Strengthening inter-agency cooperation is seen as the way forward in

- the promotion of mutual understanding
- the sharing of information and good practice
- the building of trust

Regional networks (ENQA, ANQAHE, APQN...) are seen as key players in facilitating information sharing and strengthened cooperation

Phase 2: regional expert forums (Europe, Gulf region, Asia-Pacific)

- Interactive policy dialogue between sending and receiving countries of CBHE
 - building of trust
- Recognition issues do come up in the discussions
- Provided input to the development of the Toolkit, highlighting the need to
 - consolidate the existing international guidelines
 - address the ‘trust gap’ between sending and receiving countries (role of networks)
 - the provision of up-to-date and comprehensive information on CBHE

Phase 3: the Toolkit

Offers practical guidance on:

- (1) *Information sharing*: how QAAs can improve the sharing of information on CBHE
- (2) *Co-operation in quality assurance*: how QAAs can enhance cooperation in its quality assurance
- (3) *Networks of agencies*: how networks of QAAs can facilitate information sharing and cooperation



The Toolkit: information (QA agencies)

In order to facilitate mutual understanding and trust, QA agencies should:

- have clear and accessible policies about their approach to CBHE
- make easily accessible a list of those institutions they have quality assured or accredited, including any upcoming cycle of quality assured or accredited CBHE provision
- seek to establish regular channels of communication to facilitate information sharing and the strengthening of mutual understanding

The Toolkit: co-operation (QA agencies)

In order to avoid the duplication of procedures/efforts and to lessen the burden on providers, QA agencies should:

- liaise between sending and receiving countries when undertaking review of CBHE
- consider whether they would be able to make (legal) use of each others pre-existing information or quality assurance/ accreditation decisions
- consider ways in which review activity of CBHE could be undertaken jointly

The Toolkit: cooperation (QA networks)

In order to facilitate inter-agency cooperation, networks of QA agencies should:

- consider ways in which they could serve as first point of contact for information about QA and HE systems and recognised providers in their member agencies' countries
- strengthen co-operation with other networks to promote policy dialogue, information sharing, and dissemination of good practice
- consider ways to align regional standards and guidelines to facilitate co-operation between agencies from different regions

Policy recommendations to governments

- support HEIs in harnessing the opportunities and benefits associated with CBHE, for both sending and receiving countries. To support institutions in developing the capacity needed to develop and maintain high quality provision, including facilitating the sharing of good practice and disseminating information about national approaches to CBHE.
- support agencies in facilitating the development of the required national capacities for the quality assurance of CBHE and inter-agency cooperation. This can include supporting the participation of national agencies in international networks to encouraging cooperation between agencies. Quality assuring CBHE requires adequate resources, intercultural skills, and international expertise, which may be lacking in some countries.
- facilitate the development of regular and reliable data collection systems for inbound and outbound CBHE at the national level. This is required to analyse the patterns in CBHE to develop the field further and to gain information about the required QA activities. This will also protect the system from bogus education provision.

Policy recommendations to governments

- engage in a dialogue with agencies to identify unnecessary policies or restrictions and initiate any reforms which would facilitate the QA of CBHE and cross-border cooperation in the spirit of the QACHE Toolkit. Agencies wishing to enhance coordination in the QA of CBHE through joint review activity and the recognition of other agencies' QA decisions may be hindered by restrictive national policies or regulation.
- develop, together with all stakeholders, clear policy frameworks. As recommended in the Toolkit, QA agencies should “have clear and accessible policies for the quality assurance of inbound and outbound CBHE.” Such policy frameworks should be aligned with the ESG and other international reference points such as the OECD/UNESCO Guidelines.

Recommendations to European policymakers

- support a regular mapping of cross-border activities in Europe and of their quality assurance. A broader initiative could further support national efforts to develop adequate data collection and quality assurance frameworks for CBHE that could address the situation throughout the entire EHEA.
- support policy dialogue initiatives between different stakeholders involved with CBHE in order to facilitate increased understanding of different frameworks and approaches, and eventually contribute to the strengthening of reciprocal trust. This would include supporting the activities of regional networks of QA agencies which are ideally placed to facilitate the sharing of information and good practice in the spirit of enhanced inter-agency cooperation.
- overall, support the creation of a European approach for QA in CBHE through the comprehensive implementation of the QACHE Toolkit and by means of developing favourable policy for cross-border cooperation in the quality assurance of CBHE and through capacity-building initiatives aimed at strengthening the competencies of QA agencies to respond to the challenges related to CBHE.

What did we learn?

- CBHE not only pose challenges, but it also creates opportunities: it is widening access to higher education, addressing skills gaps and furthering global citizenship.
- It is essential to explore ways to work together to fully harness the opportunities posed by CBHE while avoiding its possible challenges and shortcomings, and in particular sub-standard education provision.
- The shared goal is to facilitate the provision of quality CBHE, avoid regulatory gaps, and unnecessary discrepancies and duplication, in the ultimate interest of higher education providers and students.

*(Trifiro, F. (2015): Quality Assurance of Cross-Border Higher Education (QACHE)
– moving towards strengthened cooperation)*





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<https://qache.wordpress.com/>



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