

Current practices on external quality assurance of academic recognition among QA agencies (ENQA WG on recognition)

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Recognition poses significant challenges

- After two decades of existence of the LRC, still **problems with implementation** (*Bologna Process Implementation Report, 2015*)
- Recognition is largely within the **hands of HEIs**.
- **Higher education institutions** are **autonomous** (binding with LRC is not guaranteed)
- Recognition processes are **complex and highly diverse** (FAIR project)

Recognition is important

- One of the **main goals** of Bologna
- Linked to HEI's ability to **compete** in a HE market

*“Eventually, higher education institutions with transparent, fair and fast recognition procedures will be able to distinguish themselves in a context of increasing international student mobility and an **internationally competitive market** “*

(FAIR Project report)

- Not only a matter of competitiveness. Also linked to the **social dimension**

Lulle, Aija, and Laura Buzinska. 2017. “Between a ‘Student Abroad’ and ‘Being from Latvia’: Inequalities of Access, Prestige, and Foreign-earned Cultural Capital.” Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies.

What can the QA community do about it?

ESG 1.4

Standard:

Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student “life cycle”, e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification.

Guidelines

Fair recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study, and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, are essential components for ensuring the students’ progress in their studies, while promoting mobility. Appropriate recognition procedures rely on:

- *institutional practice for recognition being in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention;*
- *cooperation with other institutions, quality assurance agencies, and the national ENIC/NARIC centre with a view to ensuring coherent recognition across the country.*



QA “saving” recognition?

ENQA WORKING GROUP VII ON QUALITY ASSURANCE AND RECOGNITION. OBJECTIVES

“Mapping current practices on external quality assurance of academic recognition among ENQA agencies, **identifying challenges and best practices**, and developing strategies to **disseminate** the group’s research”



Meeting in Madrid (ANECA), 16 of January 2017

ENQA WORKING GROUP VII ON QUALITY ASSURANCE AND RECOGNITION

- Self-funded by members (with support and contribution by ENQA)
- Working from July 2015 to June 2017
- **Report published** at ENQA webpage in September 2017

Members of the working group:

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Under the coordination of **Lindsey Kerber (ENQA)**

Methodology

- Consideration of the **main bibliographic references** and **on-going initiatives** (Bologna Implementation Report, FAIR Project, ECA initiatives, MasterMind Project, EAR manuals, SQUARE Project, etc.)
- **Exploratory survey** to quality assurance (QA) agencies (ENQA members and affiliates) launched in **September 2016**
- Organisation of a **reflexion and dissemination event** hosted by QQI, in Dublin in 1-2 June 2017 under the title “Exploring synergies between quality assurance and qualifications recognition” (addressed to QA agencies, ENIC-NARICs and HEIs)

Results

- 1. Map current practices on EQA of academic recognition policies and practices (ESG 1.4).**
- 2. Explore relationships between QAA and ENIC-NARIC centres.**

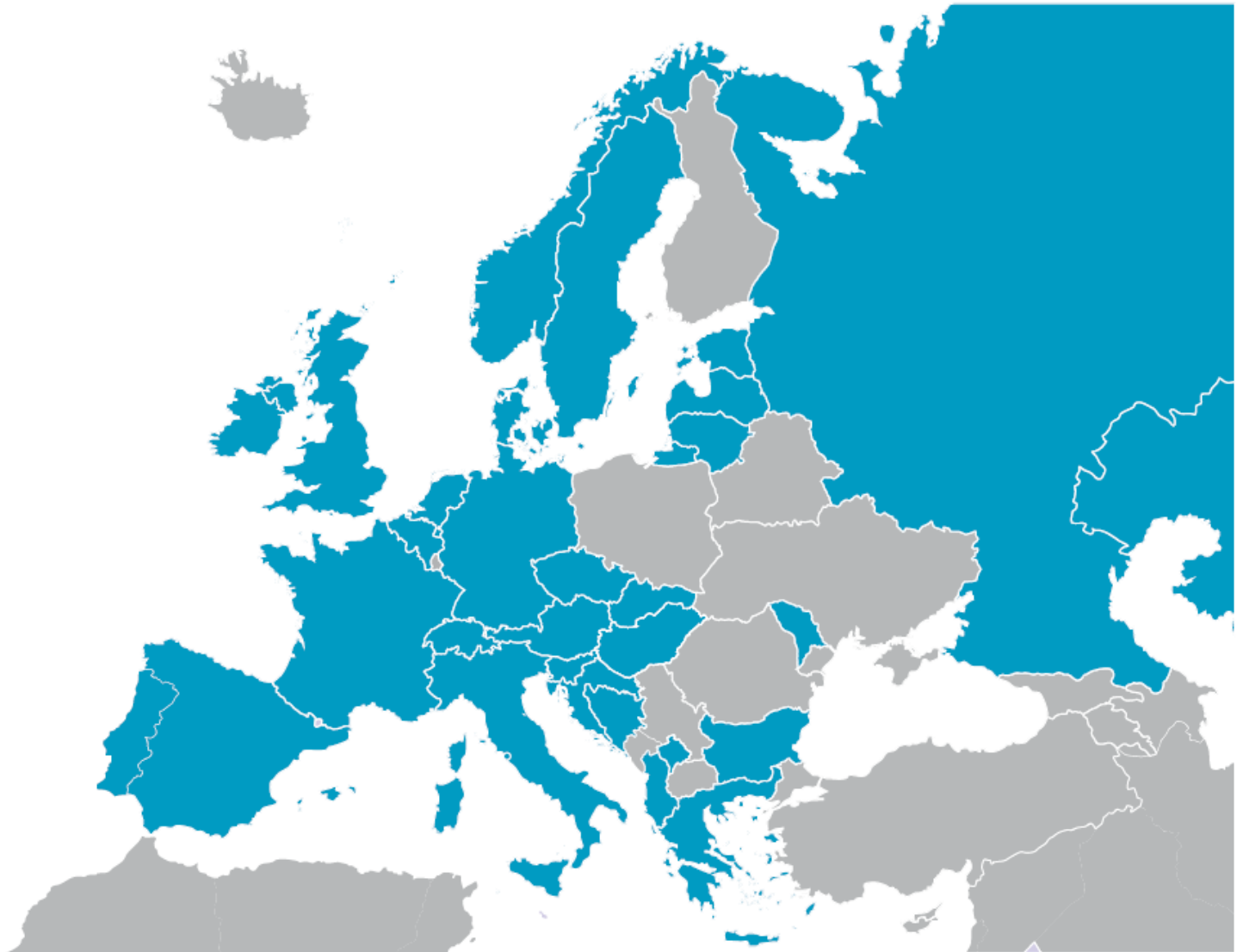
Objective 1

Map current practices on EQA of academic recognition policies and practices (ESG 1.4).

Results

- **36** ENQA members out of 51 (71% of members) and **12** affiliates out of 50 (24% of affiliates)
- Diverse group in terms of **focus** of EQA processes:
 - 10% institutional level,
 - 16 % programme level,
 - 66 % both levels.
 - 8% additional or alternative focus (research, services, consultancy...)
- 82% percent are **generalist** agencies and 12 % **subject-specific** agencies.
- **33 countries** in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) represented

Results



Typology. Three groups

**No explicit focus/
In transition**



65%

Indirect focus



12%

**Explicit focus
on EQA of
recognition**



23%

No explicit focus/ in transition

No explicit criteria covering institutional recognition practices (implicit under a general section: “admissions”, “selection”)

Institutional recognition practices are **not central** when conducting their EQA processes:

- No explicit reference to the LRC or associated tools are made in their guidelines/documents.
- Not generally part of the discussion during the on-site visit
- Not explicitly covered in the reports.



65%

No explicit focus/ in transition

Specific national contexts (HEIs do not conduct recognition-Andorra; there are other bodies with specific responsibilities-Spain)

1/3 in transition. Drivers:

- Regulatory changes (incorporation of LRC principles)
- Internal changes (governance, strategy)
- National debate on diploma mills, refugees, prior learning, increase in modularity
- ESG 2015

2/3 do not plan to change the way they handle recognition processes in the medium term



65%

Indirect focus (outcomes)



Show a strong focus on controlling the **outcomes** of the admission or mobility processes. For some “a growing concern”.

“detect and eliminate from the system bad practices regarding academic recognition, either inappropriately restrictive or inappropriately lenient”.

Some **common features**:

- **Accreditation agencies/disciplinary agencies**
- **High internationalization of HE system**

12%

Indirect focus (outcomes)



Some focus on the matter **“only if problems are detected”** (risk-based approach through the monitoring of certain metrics at the institutional and system level)

EQA processes do not necessarily focus on the aspects that would be more relevant for ESG 1.4 (general organisation of the recognition process within the institution, the use of the EAR tools and other information resources, the transparency of the process, and the main LRC principles...)

12%

Explicit focus on EQA of recognition

Show good alignment with the aspects that should be covered in their EQA processes according to ESG 1.4.



More **systematic coverage** of institutional practices and explicitly refer to the LRC principles and their associated tools.

Some common **features**:

- **Awareness at the system level** (Germany)
- Some agencies under same organization than **ENIC-NARIC body**
- **High internationalization** of HE sector and focus on QF

23%

Explicit focus on EQA of recognition

Potential good practices, **BUT** challenges and open questions:



“Even though institutions might formally have “regulations” or IQA procedures covering the LRC principles, **interpretation and proper use in practice are in fact challenging** to the practitioners of these regulations” (difficulties for interpretation, multiplicity of actors and services involved, recognition often not conceptualized as a process different from admissions/selection)

23%

Explicit focus on EQA of recognition



“Recognition is a separate topic and criterion, requiring specific knowledge. **It is really a challenge how to best address recognition matters via external quality assurance** procedures, since recognition is a vast issue, and EQA are very condensed in time, a challenge of integration.”

23%

A brave new world...

Conclusions

- Lack of **awareness** of an important part of the QA community
- Lack of **capacity**:
 - Strategy: What is the best approach?
 - Knowledge: Principles of LRC; foreign qualifications (ENIC-NARICs)
 - Resources (time, experts)

Objective 2

**Explore relationships between ENQA
and ENIC-NARIC centres**

Relationship with ENIC-NARIC

- In some cases (around 20%) **QA agency and the ENIC-NARIC are part of the same organisation.**
- However, being under the same roof does not necessarily translate in agile communication and mutual learning:

“Relationships are often non-formal, and there is a need to evolve towards more structured and fruitful ways of communication.”

Examples of joint initiatives (from “good practice” Nuffic-NVAO)

- Receiving and sharing international delegations
- Referring delegations to each other's organisations
- Presentations at each other's conferences
- Joint Erasmus+ projects

Other collaboration contexts

- **EQA of cross-border HE** (assessments of joint programmes where at least one of the partners is based outside the country)
- **Cross-border QA** (request of information from foreign HEIs and qualifications requesting EQA processes from the agency)
- **Initiatives around IQA and EQA of institutional practices** (seminars, participation of ENIC-NARIC in the procedure-guidelines, etc.). **Minoritary**

Relationship with ENIC-NARIC

- There seems to be **considerable room for improvement** regarding collaboration between QA agencies and ENIC-NARIC bodies.
- **60%** of respondents to survey declare to have **only occasional or no contact** whatsoever with the ENIC-NARIC centre.
- **56%** of respondents declared that **their relationship with the ENIC-NARIC centre was likely to evolve** towards more frequent exchange and collaboration.
- Drivers: **new formulation of ESG 1.4 and the increased internationalisation of higher education.**
- **ENIC-NARICs need to develop formulas together with QAAs addressed to improving institutional recognition practices.**

Conclusions and future steps

Four possible directions

1. Dissemination and building of awareness

There is a need to create spaces of collaboration and working groups among the three communities. Recognition issues should be made more **prominent in the agenda** of organisations at the European level, particularly the E4.

2. Establish clear guidelines for IQA and EQA (strategy)

These guidelines would be much appreciated by HEIs and QA agencies. They should be established through **cooperation of the QA, HEI and ENIC-NARIC communities**.

General **overarching principles**, most probably at the **institutional level** and **enhancement oriented** (ENQA seminar outcome)

Four possible directions

3. Exchange of good practice (capacity)

Exchange of good practice among the HEI community is needed.

QA agencies tools:

- **thematic analysis**
- **seminars**

Other organisations (such as national rector's conferences) could act as facilitators for this exchange at the national level.

Four possible directions

4. Develop EQA and peer review strategies at the level of the ENIC-NARIC community

Area of cooperation between the QA and ENIC-NARIC communities

Most likely **transferable to the institutional level and vice-versa**

ENIC-NARICs should have a leading role in evaluation/peer review of institutional recognition practices (analogy with governance or research in which other bodies are involved)

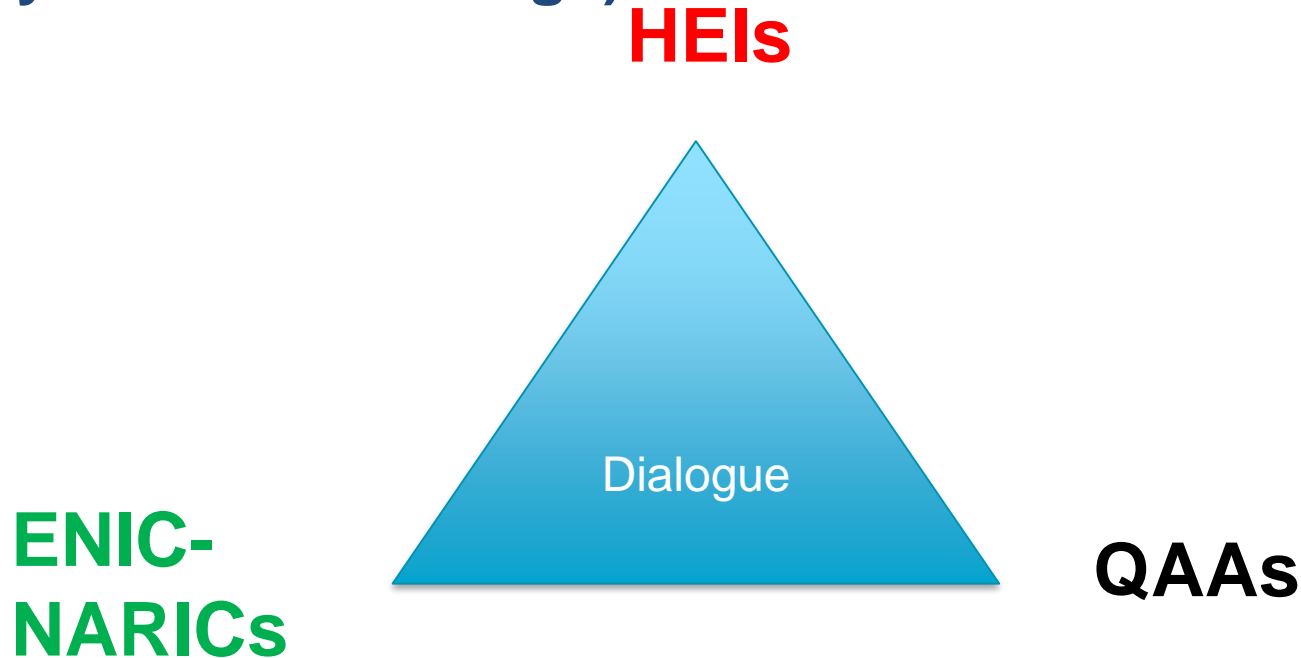
Ongoing initiatives in this sense (**SQUARE project**)

Concluding remarks

- Agencies have a **considerable actual and potential impact** over recognition of qualifications but recognition **is not currently a priority**.
- Although agencies report several collaboration initiatives, there seems to be **considerable room for improvement regarding collaboration between QA agencies and ENIC-NARIC bodies**.
- Regarding the EQA of institutional recognition practices (ESG 1.4), **a minority of agencies** seems to explicitly consider recognition practices as part of the IQA system within the higher education institutions and analyse whether they are in line with the LRC principles.
- Even those agencies that show a explicit focus on the LRC and in the EQA of recognition practices, have **several challenges and interrogations (issue under development)**

Concluding remarks

Progress to this regard will come out from the dialogue and collaboration among three communities: HEIs, QA agencies and ENIC-NARICs (QA agencies only one among many drivers of change)



Next steps:

LIREQA Erasmus + initiative (Linking Academic Recognition and Quality Assurance): QA, HEI and ENIC-NARIC communities working together towards the preparation of IQA and EQA guidelines for recognition.

Discussion





Thank you!

