EQAF
European Quality Assurance Forum

POLYTECHNIC
National Polytechnic University
of Armenia Foundation

2026 European Quality Assurance Forum

Quality assurance for skills, entrepreneurship and innovation: Partnering with the world of work

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Overview of contributions sessions

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Thursday 19 November Session I				
Time slot	**Number**	**Title**	**Presenters**	**Room**
		Workshop		
11.00 – 12.45	W 1	Who Defines Quality? – Navigating Stakeholder Perspectives in Quality Assurance	Beata Udvari	POLY-QA 222 — Trust Circuit Second floor
	W 2	Adapting quality assurance frameworks to the generative AI era: a diagnostic workshop for QA practitioners	Horia Onita, Florin Mihai	POLY-QA 228 — Impact Lab Second floor
	W 3	Strengthening Future-Proof Higher Education through External Quality Assurance: Building Partnerships between QA Agencies, Universities, and Employers	Gvantsa Dzidziguri	POLY-QA 203 — Second floor
	W 4	Strengthening the triangle of programme, workplace and student in work-based learning: A World Café on quality assurance across contexts	Kasja Weenink, Maruschka Kinds, Anne Klaas Schilder, Anouk Baars, Lisette Hogenkamp	POLY-QA 204 - Evidence Studio Second floor
	W 5	Designing a Joint Programme: A Case Lab on Innovation, Quality and Employability	Ulrike Krawagna, Tabea Mager	POLY-QA 209 — Learning Loop Second floor
	W6	TPG QA Cult: Cultivating self-reflection and constructive criticism in academic communities	Stephen Tyre	POLY-QA 205 — Quality Blueprint Second floor

Paper				
11.00 – 11.45	P 1	From Accreditation to Transformation: How Quality Assurance Connects Engineering Education with the World of Work	Solange Pisarz, Timothée Toury	POLY-QA 221 — Quality Nexus Second floor
	P 2	Participatory Quality Assurance in Capacity Building Projects: A Mixed-Methods Model for Work-Based and Cross-Cultural Skill Building	Heiko Fritz, Chris High	POLY-QA 223 — Innovation Engine Second floor
	P 4	Quality Assuring Doctoral Impact: The Potential of Readiness Level Frameworks	Michael Gille, Johanna Krappe, Daan Andriessen, Lisette Munneke, Manuel Moreira da Silva	POLY-QA Exchange Second floor
12.00 – 12.45	P 6	Recognition of Prior Learning as a Bridge Between the World of Work and Higher Education	Caroline Bischof, Agnes Witzani, Ulrike Haider-Moser	POLY-QA 223 — Innovation Engine Second floor
	P 7	Beyond the Diploma? Micro-credentials, Quadruple Helix Collaboration and Quality Assurance in Future-Oriented Higher Education	Stanisław Lewko	POLY-QA 225 — Excellence Forum Second floor
	P 8	How do you design quality assurance for something that does not yet fully exist? Lessons from emerging transnational excellence hubs	Liana Berkowitz, Carolin Gläser	POLY-QA Exchange Second floor

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Thursday 19 November Session II				
Time slot	**Number**	**Title**	**Presenters**	**Room**
Paper				
14.15 – 15.00	P 9	Quality assurance of work-based learning in higher education: policy design lessons from Romania's dual studies framework	Horia Onita, Daniela-Cristina Ghitulica	POLY-QA 221 — Quality Nexus Second floor
	P 10	Beyond Employability: Student Experience and Pedagogical Challenges in Practitioner-Led Higher Education	Aida Ter-Ghazaryan	POLY-QA 223 — Innovation Engine Second floor
	P 11	Lifelong Learning and Micro-Credentials in European University Alliances: Emerging Approaches to Quality Assurance and Institutional Transformation	Ana Tecilazić , Ivana Verveger	POLY-QA 225 — Excellence Forum Second floor
	P 12	From Formal Requirements to Institutional Learning? Quality Assurance, Employability and Academic Mission in Western Balkan Higher Education	Kseanela Sotirofski	POLY-QA Exchange Second floor
	P 13	Beyond Linear Measurements: Recognising Complex Capabilities for Future-Proof Employability in Higher Education	Berta Paz Lourido	POLY-QA 222 — Trust Circuit Second floor
	P 14	Between flexibility and assurance: a lean approach to internal QA for lifelong learning	Luk Schoofs, Brigitte Loosen, Aaron Soens	POLY-QA 228 — Impact Lab Second floor
Poster Presentation				

14.15 – 15.00	Po1	From Flexibility to Trust: Quality Assuring Lifelong Learning Pathways in Swiss Higher Education	Katrin Meyer	
	Po2	Integrating complex Expectations: Building Future-Proof Higher Education in Estonia	Kaija Kumpas-Lenk	
	Po3	From Labels to Barriers: Quality Assurance in Times of Crisis and Rapid Change	Viktoriia Rudyk, Nataliia Yakovenko, Antonina Novak	
	Po4	External Stakeholder Involvement in Quality Assurance of Microcredentials: A Framework for Higher Education	Izabela Savickiene, Aurelija Valeikienė, Nora Skaburskiene	
	Po5	EQAR Knowledge Base: a tool for system-level information on QA	Aleksandra Zhivkovikj, Aleksandar Susnjar	
	Po6	EUR-ACE® as a QA bridge between engineering education and the labour market: the ARACIS Experience	Stefania-Maria Armaselu	
	Po7	Generative AI and Quality Assurance in Dutch Higher Education: Enhancing an integral approach through thematic analyses	Kasja Weenink, Anouk Baars	
	Po8	Quality Assurance in Non-Linear Learning Environments: Lessons from Five Years of Educational Experimentation at the University of Bergamo	Vittorio Zanetti, Giuditta Pezzotta, Rebecca Cazzato Lombardi	

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Friday 20 November Session III				
Time slot	**Number**	**Title**	**Presenters**	**Room**
		Workshop		
09.30 – 11.15	W 7	From Compliance to Catalysis: Re-engineering QA to Support Research? Based Innovation Ecosystems	Arevik Sargsyan	POLY-QA 222 — Trust Circuit Second floor
	W 8	Co-Designing Quality Frameworks for Research-Based Innovation Ecosystems	Ana Tecilazić, Ivana Ververger, Jacqueline O'Toole, Jakub Grodecki, Mathieu Winand, Nicola Anderson, Wes M. Lindinger, Žydrūnė Žemaitytė-Kviklienė	POLY-QA 228 — Impact Lab Second floor
	W 9	The Joint European Degree Label: assessing evidence in practice. A guided walkthrough	Ieva Grumbinaitė, Josef Matoušek, Alexandru Carțiș	POLY-QA 203 — Second floor
	W 10	Cultivating collective intelligence and quality culture: engaging stakeholders in QA through Sociocracy 3.0	Aaron Soens, Nina Callebaut	POLY-QA 204 — Evidence Studio Second floor
	W 11	TPG QA Int: Building robust QA for international cooperation	Aisling Reast	POLY-QA 205 — Quality Blueprint Second floor

Paper				
09.30 – 10.15	P 15	Through the Learner's Eyes: Rethinking Quality in Digitally Enhanced Teaching and Learning	Liia Lauri, Toomas Plank, Lehti Pilt, Aleksandra Dolgopolova, Anneli Veispak	POLY-QA 221 — Quality Nexus Second floor
	P 16	From compliance to institutional capacity: rethinking institutional review for innovation and societal engagement	Maria Manatos, Marie Gould	POLY-QA 223 — Innovation Engine Second floor
	P 17	Future-proofing higher education through institution-owned quality assurance: lessons from the Flemish institutional review cycle 2019 - 2025	Dagmar Provijn, Cathy Hauspie, Veerle Conings	POLY-QA Exchange Second floor
	P 18	Where Should Change Happen? Constructive Alignment as a Quality Assurance Tool for Responding to Employer Needs	Varduhi Gyulazyan, Ruben Topchyan, Naira Harutyunyan	POLY-QA 225 — Excellence Forum Second floor
10.30 – 11.15	P 19	Evaluating the Labour-Market Relevance of Micro-Credentials: Evidence from QA Agency ESG Aligned Practices	Aleksandra Zhivkovikj	POLY-QA 221 — Quality Nexus Second floor
	P 20	Designed for Whom? Accreditation Criteria and UAS Doctoral Education in European Binary Systems	Johanna Krappe, Michael Gille	POLY-QA 223 — Innovation Engine Second floor
	P21	Beyond Compatibility, Revisited: Quality Assurance to Foster Europeanisation. Evidence from the First Full Implementation Cycle of the Standards and Guidelines for Harmonisation in EUt+	Rafael Toledo-Moreo, Emilija Zane Sarma, Timothée Toury	POLY-QA 225 — Excellence Forum Second floor

Description of sessions

Workshops:

WORKSHOP 1: Who Defines Quality? – Navigating Stakeholder Perspectives in Quality Assurance

Time: Thursday 19 November, 11.00 – 12.45

Room: POLY-QA 222 — Trust Circuit, Second floor

Facilitators: Beata Udvari, University of Szeged

Abstract:

Stakeholder engagement is widely recognised as a cornerstone of quality assurance, yet in practice it often presents challenges due to differing priorities, expectations, communication styles, and understandings of quality among stakeholders.

This interactive workshop explores these challenges through a simulation focused on developing a graduate exit survey. Participants take on stakeholder roles – including students, academics, quality assurance professionals, data specialists, and labour market representatives – and collaboratively decide what information should be collected regarding graduates' preparedness for employment, further study, and societal engagement.

Through role-play, group reflection, and facilitated discussion, participants experience how diverse perspectives shape decision-making and how structured engagement can support productive collaboration. The workshop moves beyond theory, offering practical strategies for facilitating dialogue, managing disagreement, and fostering shared ownership of quality enhancement processes.

By the end of the session, participants will gain practical tools for engaging diverse stakeholders in quality assurance activities, along with a deeper understanding of how collaborative processes contribute to more meaningful and future-oriented quality enhancement.

WORKSHOP 2: Adapting quality assurance frameworks to the generative AI era: a diagnostic workshop for QA practitioners

Time: Thursday 19 November, 11.00 – 12.45

Room: POLY-QA 228 — Impact Lab, Second floor

Facilitators: Horia Onita and Florin Mihai, ARACIS

Abstract:

The session draws on a systematic analysis of 46 quality assurance agencies, conducted by ARACIS, mapping how the QA frameworks adapted to the use of generative AI in higher education, as well as a survey addressed to Romanian higher education institutions identifying existing challenges, suitable responses and the extent to which the impact of AI is integrated into internal QA policies

and practice. Considering the link between QA, academic integrity and artificial intelligence, the session considers existing models of good practice and emerging QA standards that characterize mature, AI-adapted QA frameworks.

Starting from this evidence base and proposing a matrix of how QA agencies respond to AI's impact in learning-teaching-assessment, the core of the workshop is structured as a diagnostic exercise in which participants apply a QA-AI Maturity Matrix to assess their own agency's or institution's readiness. Working in small mixed groups, participants will be able to identify gaps, compare strategies across contexts, and work on recommendations that can be implemented in their agencies/institutions.

WORKSHOP 3: Strengthening Future-Proof Higher Education through External Quality Assurance: Building Partnerships between QA Agencies, Universities, and Employers

Time: Thursday 19 November, 11.00 – 12.45

Room: POLY-QA 203, Second floor

Facilitators: Gvantsa Dzidziguri, National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement

Abstract:

This interactive workshop explores how external quality assurance agencies can support higher education institutions in developing future-proof education that responds to rapidly changing labour market demands, digital transformation, and emerging societal challenges. Drawing on the experience of National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement, the session will demonstrate how quality assurance frameworks can encourage stronger cooperation between universities, employers, students, and other stakeholders while preserving academic integrity and institutional autonomy.

Participants will engage in practical group activities focused on designing quality assurance approaches that foster employability, entrepreneurship, digital innovation, and stakeholder engagement. Through collaborative exercises and scenario-based discussions, participants will analyse challenges related to aligning educational programmes with labour market expectations and explore mechanisms for integrating employer feedback, AI-enhanced learning, and competency-based approaches into QA processes.

The workshop aims to provide transferable tools and peer-learning opportunities for QA agencies and higher education institutions across different national contexts. Participants will leave with practical ideas for developing responsive and innovation-oriented QA approaches that strengthen trust, relevance, and resilience in higher education systems.

WORKSHOP 4: Strengthening the triangle of programme, workplace and student in work-based learning: A World Café on quality assurance across contexts

Time: Thursday 19 November, 11.00 – 12.45

Room: POLY-QA 204 — Evidence Studio, Second floor

Facilitator: Kasja Weenink, Anne Klaas Schilder, Anouk Baars and Lisette Hogenkamp, NVAO; Maruschka Kinds, Dutch Association of Universities of Applied Sciences

Abstract:

This workshop builds directly on the thematic analysis 'Managing Practice: Work-Based Learning in Associate degree programmes' (level 5 EQF) by NVAO Netherlands, which combines an analysis of 44 accreditation review reports with focus groups involving programme managers, students, representatives from the professional field and review panel chairs. The workshop centres on the programme-workplace-student triangle as the core site where work-based learning is organised and quality is experienced in practice. The thematic analysis presents an ambivalent picture. Work-based learning is well integrated in educational programmes. It supports students' professional development, yet stakeholders also encounter recurring bottlenecks in supervision, coordination, the concretisation of learning tasks and the safeguarding of quality—especially in part-time variants, where responsibility often rests heavily on students. Using a World Café format, participants will reflect on how such issues appear in institutions in different national, regional and international contexts and develop strategies for strengthening collaboration and quality assurance across diverse models of work-based learning.

WORKSHOP 5: Designing a Joint Programme: A Case Lab on Innovation, Quality and Employability

Time: Thursday 19 November, 11.00 – 12.45

Room: POLY-QA 209 — Learning Loop, Second floor

Facilitators: Ulrike Krawagna, University of Graz; Tabea Mager, Leipzig University

Abstract:

Joint programmes (JPs) are increasingly promoted in Europe as a way to make higher education more future proof. They integrate international and intercultural learning, connect students with research and innovation, and strengthen cross border links with the world of work. By combining the strengths of several institutions, they offer attractive learning opportunities and foster and transversal skills. At the same time, designing and assuring the quality of JPs remains demanding, particularly when different national frameworks and stakeholders are involved. This workshop combines concise, structured inputs from experienced facilitators with a hands-on "Designing a Joint Programme" case lab. After a short introduction to JPs, their added value, common models and typical implementation and QA challenges, facilitators present a practical "design & QA checklist" to help participants think through design choices and align them with institutional QA systems and, where relevant, the European Approach for QA of JPs. Working in small groups, participants use short case scenarios, the checklist and templates to sketch the design and QA approach of a JP. In the final plenary, facilitators help groups compare their solutions, make visible key choices and compromises, and relate the cases to participants' own contexts. Participants leave better equipped to identify challenges and opportunities for developing JPs in their own settings.

WORKSHOP 6: TPG QA Cult - Cultivating self-reflection and constructive criticism in academic communities

Time: Thursday 19 November, 11.00 – 12.45

Room: POLY-QA 205 — Quality Blueprint, Second floor

Facilitator: Stephen Tyre, University of St Andrews

Abstract:

This workshop draws on the work of EUA's 2026 thematic peer group on "Cultivating self-reflection and constructive criticism in academic communities". It explores how higher education institutions can engage leaders, academics and students in quality enhancement and involve them in designing and improving quality assurance processes.

Through discussion and peer exchange, participants will reflect on their own experiences and share good practices for supporting self-reflection, constructive criticism and shared responsibility for quality. They will consider how to encourage open dialogue, bring together different perspectives and ensure that feedback leads to meaningful improvement. Particular attention will be paid to the roles of leaders, academics and students, and to ways of making their involvement useful and relevant.

Participants will also discuss barriers to engagement and risk factors that may undermine efforts to strengthen quality culture. They will leave with a better understanding of practices that support an institutional quality culture, greater awareness of potential challenges and practical ideas to adapt to their own contexts.

WORKSHOP 7: From Compliance to Catalysis: Re-engineering QA to Support Research-Based Innovation Ecosystems

Time: Friday 20 November, 09.30 – 11.15

Room: POLY-QA 222 — Trust Circuit, Second floor

Facilitator: Arevik Sargsyan, National Polytechnic University of Armenia

Abstract:

In modern life, innovation ecosystems thrive on agility, yet traditional Higher Education

Quality Assurance (QA) systems are often designed for stability and formal compliance. This workshop explores how to reconcile these drivers, moving from a culture of control to a culture of enablement. Drawing on Dr. Sargsyan's trial expertise in high-tech research, professional business coaching and Adult Education methodology as well, this session offers a cross-disciplinary toolkit for re-engineering QA. We invite participants to examine their institutional policies as catalysts for innovation rather than administrative obstacles. Through collaborative co-creation, attendees will map their internal "Researcher Journeys" and redesign feedback loops that connect research outcomes directly with industrial and societal needs. Participants will leave with a concrete roadmap for transforming local QA systems into robust, research-based innovation enablers.

WORKSHOP 8: Co-Designing Quality Frameworks for Research-Based Innovation Ecosystems

Time: Friday 20 November, 09.30 – 11.15

Room: POLY-QA 228 — Impact Lab, Second floor

Facilitator: Ana Tecilazić and Ivana Verveger, Algebra Bernays University; Jacqueline O'Toole and Nicola Anderson, Atlantic Technological University; Jakub Grodecki, EURASHE; Mathieu Winand, University of Luxembourg; Wes M. Lindinger, University of Applied Sciences Technikum Wien; Žydrūnė Žemaitytė-Kviklienė, Vytautas Magnus University

Abstract:

Through a structured and highly interactive process, participants will explore how internal quality assurance can act as an institutional integrator, connecting education, research, innovation, and engagement with the world of work. After a brief introduction to a draft quality framework, participants will work in facilitated groups, each focusing on one of four interlinked dimensions: governance and cross-institutional alignment, stakeholder engagement, the use of trustworthy data and evidence, and feedback loops for continuous enhancement. The groups will identify key challenges, institutional roles, mechanisms, and possible solutions, and will then present their conclusions in a joint plenary discussion. The final stage of the workshop will enable participants to reflect on the links and interdependencies between the four dimensions and to integrate their contributions into a coherent, co-designed quality framework for supporting a research-based innovation ecosystem. The resulting framework will serve as a practical reflection tool for institutions seeking to strengthen innovation, skills development, entrepreneurship, external partnerships, and institutional enhancement through quality assurance.

WORKSHOP 9: The Joint European Degree Label: assessing evidence in practice. A guided walkthrough

Time: Friday 20 November, 09.30 – 11.15

Room: POLY-QA 203, Second floor

Facilitator: Ieva Grumbinaitė, PPMI/Part of the Verian Group; Josef Matoušek, Charles University; Alexandru Carțiș CIVIS, Europe's Civic University Alliance and University of Bucharest. All of them members of the Advisory Board to the European Degree Policy Lab.

Abstract:

Submitted on behalf of the European Commission, as part of the work of the Advisory Board to the European Degree Policy Lab, the session turns the Joint European Degree Label from a policy framework into a practical, collaborative exercise. Participants will work with two joint programmes, crafted self-assessment reports, and realistic evidence portfolios. In small groups, they will examine three criteria covering joint programme arrangements, learning beyond academia and employability, and multilingualism.

The evidence will not provide easy answers. Participants will have to decide what is convincing, what remains unclear, and what further information an assessment panel should request. By comparing decisions in plenary, the workshop will reveal how different professional and

institutional perspectives can shape the interpretation of the same evidence.

The final discussion will look beyond the decision itself: is the Label merely a compliance check, or can it also help institutions strengthen programme design and future-oriented learning? Participants will leave with a clearer understanding of how the Label works in practice and what it may mean for both quality assurance bodies and higher education institutions.

WORKSHOP 10: Cultivating collective intelligence and quality culture: engaging stakeholders in QA through Sociocracy 3.0

Time: Friday 20 November, 09.30 – 11.15

Room: POLY-QA 204 — Evidence Studio, Second floor

Facilitator: Aaron Soens and Nina Callebaut, Odisee University of Applied Sciences

Abstract:

How can higher education institutions move from compliance-driven quality assurance towards a shared quality culture that actively engages the world of work and students? This interactive workshop introduces Sociocracy 3.0 (S3) as a practical approach to structuring participation, collective intelligence and decision-making in quality assurance.

Participants will not only learn the method, but also apply it to collaboratively explore and address a concrete challenge aligned with the EQAF theme. Through this process, they will engage in meaningful dialogue on stakeholder involvement, innovation and responsiveness to society and the labour market, simulating the type of interaction institutions aim to establish with external partners and learners.

Working in small groups, participants will formulate a driver, explore it through generative questions and co-create a concrete proposal using consent decision-making. The structured nature of the method ensures that all voices—including those of students and external stakeholders—can be meaningfully integrated.

The workshop builds on experience of embedding sociocratic principles in internal quality assurance and shows how participatory approaches can bridge compliance and continuous improvement. Participants will leave with a transferable methodology and a concrete experience to strengthen quality culture in their own context.

WORKSHOP 11: TPG QA Int - *Building robust QA for international cooperation*

Time: Friday 20 November, 09.30 – 11.15

Room: POLY-QA 205 — Quality Blueprint, Second floor

Facilitator: Aisling Reast, RCSI, University of Medicine & Health Sciences

Abstract:

This interactive workshop is facilitated by members of the 2026 EUA Quality Assurance Thematic Peer Group (TPG), “Building robust quality assurance for international cooperation.”

The TPG brings together nine higher education institutions from across the EHEA to explore how quality assurance can enable sustainable international cooperation, particularly in joint programmes and cross-border partnerships. Drawing on participants' institutional experience, the group has considered how institutions can move beyond fragmented, project-based arrangements towards shared, embedded and sustainable QA practices.
The discussions have shown that successful cooperation requires more than technical alignment. Trust, a shared understanding of key concepts, staff competences, clear governance, early planning and meaningful student engagement are central conditions for success. Institutions nevertheless face persistent challenges, including different legal and regulatory requirements, different interpretations of the European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes, duplication of procedures, divergent institutional cultures and limited resources.

Participants will work in small groups to compare their own experiences with the TPG's emerging practical guidance. They will identify key obstacles and promising approaches in three areas: implementing the European Approach in practice; streamlining QA through mutual recognition, shared processes and common tools; and navigating legal, procedural and cultural differences.

The session will generate peer learning and help refine practical, transferable guidance for institutions developing international partnerships.

Papers:

PAPER 1: From Accreditation to Transformation: How Quality Assurance Connects Engineering Education with the World of Work

Time: Thursday 19 November, 11.00 – 11.45

Room: POLY-QA 221 — Quality Nexus, Second floor

Presenter: Solange Pisarz and Timothée Toury, Commission des titres d'ingénieur CTI

Chair: Jakub Brdulak

Abstract:

In the context of rapid digital, environmental, and societal transitions, engineering education faces increasing pressure to align with the evolving expectations of the "world of work". In this environment, Quality Assurance (QA) can no longer be viewed solely as a mechanism for compliance and accreditation; it is becoming a strategic driver of pedagogical, organizational, and institutional transformation.

With a Board composed of half academics and half socio-economic representatives, CTI is well designed to play its role in this field.

This paper explores how CTI frameworks monitor and also strengthen the connection between engineering education and the competencies required by employers. Drawing on a qualitative approach that combines policy analysis, institutional practices, and examples of HEI-industry collaboration, the study identifies three major dynamics. First, CTI standards are competency-based and emphasize not only technical expertise but also transversal skills such as communication, adaptability, interdisciplinary collaboration, and lifelong learning.

Second, the French engineering HEIs have a dedicated model encouraging co-creation between higher education institutions and socio-economic stakeholders through industrial advisory boards, project-based learning, internships, and employer participation in curriculum evaluation and improvement. These aspects are also evaluated by CTI and sometimes justify a negative decision for accreditation. The role of CTI is the one of the gatekeeper: encourage the HEIs to adapt to the needs of their environment; but also protecting students and society from attractive market illusions that would not be quality oriented.

Third, QA mechanisms and CTI framework and evaluations serve as catalysts for pedagogical innovation by supporting continuous improvement, experimentation, and the integration of sustainability, ethics, and social responsibility into engineering programs. By examining the role of CTI and QA as a dynamic interface between higher education and employment ecosystems, this contribution addresses the conference theme and highlights the evolving role of QA connecting education and the "world of work", training competent professionals, but also responsible innovators and engaged citizens.

PAPER 2: Participatory Quality Assurance in Capacity Building Projects: A Mixed-Methods Model for Work-Based and Cross-Cultural Skill Building

Time: Thursday 19 November, 11.00 – 11.45

Room: POLY-QA 223 — Innovation Engine, Second floor

Presenter: Heiko Fritz and Chris High, Linnaeus University Växjö

Chair: Ronny Heintze

Abstract:

This paper presents an innovative, participatory quality assurance (QA) model designed to support capacity building and lifelong learning in flexible, work-based and cross-cultural training environments. Developed within an Erasmus+ capacity building project for youth workers in selected Mediterranean countries, the model integrates participatory evaluation, the most significant change (MSC) technique, participatory instant messaging (PIM) and survey-based methods into a coherent and rigorous QA framework. Although situated in the youth work sector, the approach directly addresses the EQAF 2026 theme by demonstrating how QA can enhance the quality, relevance and trustworthiness of capacity-building and vocational training in diverse professional contexts.

A central feature of the model is its multi-stakeholder design. Trainers, facilitators, youth workers and young people contribute continuously to assessing progress, identifying challenges and shaping improvements. PIM enables real-time, low-threshold engagement across linguistic and cultural boundaries, allowing participants to share written reflections, micro media artefacts and structured feedback throughout the project lifecycle. MSC provides a narrative-based lens through which participants articulate meaningful changes in their professional practice, while pre- and post-training surveys introduce analytical rigour and comparability. Together, these elements create a dynamic QA system that balances contextual sensitivity with methodological robustness.

The model's value extends well beyond its original context. Its flexibility, digital accessibility and emphasis on stakeholder co-creation make it highly transferable to higher education settings,

particularly in capacity building initiatives, vocational education, continuing professional development and micro-credential programmes. As higher education funding increasingly prioritises labour market relevance, societal impact and cross-sector collaboration, this QA model offers a practical and scalable approach for assuring the quality of work-based and community-embedded learning. The paper concludes by outlining how participatory, mixed-methods QA can support innovation, strengthen cooperation with external partners and enhance institutional responsiveness to evolving skills needs.

PAPER 4: Quality Assuring Doctoral Impact: The Potential of Readiness Level Frameworks

Time: Thursday 19 November, 11.00 – 11.45

Room: POLY-QA Exchange, Second floor

Presenters: Michael Gille, Hamburg University of Applied Sciences; Johanna Krappe, Turku University and Turku University of Applied Sciences; Daan Andriessen and Lisette Munneke, Hoogeschool Utrecht; Manuel Moreira da Silva, Polytechnico de Porto

Chair: Natalia Greniewska

Abstract:

Recent European policy initiatives, including the Letta and Draghi reports, have renewed calls for stronger connections between research, innovation and economic competitiveness. At the same time, doctoral education is increasingly expected to contribute to employability, knowledge transfer and wider societal value while maintaining its central academic purpose. This development raises an important challenge for quality assurance: How can doctoral education account for broader forms of impact without subordinating research to short-term economic expectations?

The contribution examines nine established readiness frameworks to identify dimensions that may be relevant for doctoral quality assurance. Originally developed to describe the progression of innovations from early-stage concepts to practical application, frameworks such as Technology Readiness Levels, Societal Readiness Levels and Market Readiness Levels provide ways of tracing the pathways through which knowledge becomes socially and economically meaningful. Because they focus on developmental trajectories rather than predetermined outcomes, these frameworks may be applicable across disciplinary, institutional and national settings.

The contribution proposes a readiness-based heuristic for discussing doctoral impact in quality assurance. It draws on scholarship on doctoral impact, CoARA (Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment) discussions on societal impact, ResearchComp (European Competence Framework for Researchers) as well as debates on doctoral employability.

The analysis assumes that doctoral education remains fundamentally defined by the production of original knowledge, consistent with the Salzburg Principles. Readiness perspectives are therefore not conceived as additional assessment criteria, but as complementary quality assurance instruments that make visible competences associated with collaboration, knowledge transfer, societal engagement and innovation. In this way, a readiness-informed perspective may support doctoral candidates in reflecting on potential impact pathways while encouraging dialogue among universities, employers and innovation ecosystems.

PAPER 5: Quality-Assured Micro-Credentials for Lifelong Learning: A Transferable Framework from Georgia's Higher Education Reform

Time: Thursday 19 November, 12.00 – 12.45

Room: POLY-QA 221 — Quality Nexus, Second floor

Presenter: Natia Zedginidze-jishkariani, Erasmus + Georgia, NCQE, EWU

Chair: Urszula Lis

Abstract:

Across the European Higher Education Area and its partner regions, micro-credentials are moving from the margins to the centre of the lifelong-learning agenda. Yet many systems particularly those at an early stage of adoption face a common gap between conceptual readiness and operational implementation. This workshop examines how quality assurance can turn that readiness into a coherent, trusted national framework for upskilling and reskilling.

Building on Georgia's 2025 higher education reform, on Erasmus+/HERE peer-learning, and on comparative models discussed across EU partner countries (Ireland's national MicroCreds platform, Astana IT University's stackable credentials, Morocco's employer-co-designed AMEL project, and EQAR/DEQAR recognition tools), the paper traces a phased pathway: defining micro-credentials within the national qualifications framework; adapting QA so that it is proportionate to short, skills-focused learning without weakening academic standards; enabling stackability and ECTS-based credit recognition; and embedding employer co-design and digital credentialing.

Rather than describing policy, the paper focuses on the institutional and regulatory mechanisms through which reform becomes practice, and on the tensions involved maintaining trust and comparability while allowing flexibility; aligning university provision with a fast-moving private training market; and protecting learners across formal, non-formal and informal routes.

The workshop closes with a set of QA design principles and an implementation sequence that participants can test against their own systems, inviting critical comparison of where quality assurance should lead, follow, or stay deliberately light.

PAPER 6: Recognition of Prior Learning as a Bridge Between the World of Work and Higher Education

Time: Thursday 19 November, 12.00 – 12.45

Room: POLY-QA 223 — Innovation Engine, Second floor

Presenter: Caroline Bischof and Agnes Witzani, Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria); Ulrike Haider-Moser, University of Applied Sciences BFI Vienna

Chair: Jakub Grodecki

Abstract:

As labour markets undergo rapid transformation, higher education institutions are increasingly expected to support lifelong learning through flexible pathways trusted by learners, institutions, and employers. At the same time, much valuable learning takes place outside formal higher education, especially through professional experience and continuing education. The challenge for higher education is therefore not only to offer new learning opportunities, but also to recognize learners' existing competences and skills in quality-assured ways.

This paper examines Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) as a quality-assured mechanism for connecting higher education and the labour market. RPL is used to translate competences and skills acquired in different learning contexts into higher education achievements. It supports permeability at multiple stages of the learner journey: by enabling access to higher education and by recognizing prior learning for credits.

The paper combines the perspective of AQ Austria as a quality assurance agency with a case study of the University of Applied Sciences BFI Vienna. The Austrian universities of applied sciences sector provides a particularly relevant context because its orientation towards professional practice and close engagement with labour market stakeholders offers a distinctive model of how higher education can respond to diverse learner biographies and labour market needs without weakening academic standards. Within this context, University of Applied Sciences BFI Vienna has developed extensive experience with recognizing prior learning within degree programs and, uniquely in Austria, for admission to higher education.

The case study discusses how learning-outcome-oriented curriculum design and recognition processes interact at University of Applied Sciences BFI Vienna to balance academic standards, permeability and flexibility. Quality assurance plays a major role in securing academic standards in recognition. The paper concludes by reflecting the success factors for fostering permeability between the learning spaces of the world of work and higher education in a strategic and quality assured way.

PAPER 7: Beyond the Diploma? Micro-credentials, Quadruple Helix Collaboration and Quality Assurance in Future-Oriented Higher Education

Time: Thursday 19 November, 12.00 – 12.45

Room: POLY-QA 225 — Excellence Forum, Second floor

Presenters: Stanisław Lewko, Polish Accreditation Committee

Chair: Sylvie Navarre

Abstract:

In the context of lifelong learning and rapidly evolving labour market, traditional degree models are increasingly challenged by demands for flexibility, stakeholder engagement and new approaches to competence recognition.

The aim of this presentation is to show how collaboration between HE institutions, students, employers, policymakers and local communities – understood through the Quadruple Helix

framework – supports the development of innovative study programmes and new approaches to competence recognition. Particular attention is paid to micro-credentials as a practical outcome of stakeholder collaboration and as a mechanism linking higher education with evolving societal and labour market expectations.

The discussion is based on three international case studies: the Joint Bachelor's Degree in Sustainable Blue Economy (SeaBluE) developed within the SEA-EU alliance, the Joint Bachelor in Sustainability (BASUS) coordinated by Jagiellonian University within Una Europa, and the Polish programme Solidarity Studies developed by the University of Gdańsk in cooperation with the European Solidarity Centre. All three programmes demonstrate strong stakeholder involvement in programme design and quality development.

Within the Quadruple Helix framework, micro-credentials support lifelong learning and more personalised educational pathways. This presentation adopts a student-centred perspective and examines how stakeholder-driven programme design and micro-credentials may increase higher education attractiveness.

The presentation will also examine how quality assurance frameworks can support stakeholder co-creation, lifelong learning and the integration of micro-credentials into HE systems, drawing on the example of New Zealand's national micro-credential framework to illustrate how micro-credentials can be embedded within a national qualifications system while responding to social and labour market needs.

The presentation argues that the future development of HE depends not only on what universities teach, but also on how effectively they collaborate with the wider ecosystem surrounding them to create flexible learning pathways for lifelong learning.

PAPER 8: How do you design quality assurance for something that does not yet fully exist? Lessons from emerging transnational excellence hubs

Time: Thursday 19 November, 12.00 – 12.45

Room: POLY-QA Exchange, Second floor

Presenters: Liana Berkowitz and Carolin Gläser, UNINOVIS European University

Chair: Daniela Cracium

Abstract:

European University alliances are developing new forms of collaboration that go beyond traditional academic programs and institutional structures. Within this landscape, UNINOVIS stands out for its distinctive focus on applied data science literacy. Launched in 2025, the alliance addresses a field that is not only highly specific among alliances, but also increasingly essential today. As data-driven/decision-making transforms nearly every sector, UNINOVIS responds to a pressing need: equipping learners, professionals, and regional ecosystems with the applied skills required to understand, use and shape this transformation.

A central ambition of the alliance is the development of transnational "excellence hubs": dynamic

ecosystems connecting education, research, and the professional world through challenge-based learning, innovation projects, and partnerships with external stakeholders.

As these hubs are still being developed, they are evolving unevenly across institutional and national contexts. This raises an important question: how can quality assurance be designed for structures that are not yet fully defined, stabilized, comparable?

This contribution reflects on the early-stage implementation of UNINOVIS' excellence hubs: an alliance composed of universities of applied sciences and other higher education institutions. While some hub-related activities are already emerging, including hackathons, challenge-based learning initiatives, and collaborative projects with external partners, the overall model remains under construction.

Rather than presenting a mature quality assurance system, the contribution examines how QA can be developed in parallel with implementation. It explores how emerging QA approaches can support coherence across institutions, responsiveness to labour market needs, stakeholder co-design, piloting, monitoring, recognition, and the scaling of flexible learning offers, including micro-credentials and lifelong learning pathways.

By analyzing these early experiences, the paper identifies emerging principles for designing QA in innovation ecosystems still under construction. It invites discussion on how QA frameworks can remain both robust and adaptable while supporting new forms of collaboration between higher education and the professional sector.

PAPER 9: Quality assurance of work-based learning in higher education: policy design lessons from Romania's dual studies framework

Time: Thursday 19 November, 14.15 – 15.00

Room: POLY-QA 221 — Quality Nexus, Second floor

Presenter: Horia Onita and Daniela-Cristina Ghitulica, ARACIS

Chair: Eva Fernandez de Labastida

Abstract:

Work-based learning (WBL) in higher education is attracting growing policy attention across Europe, driven by expectations for practice-oriented graduates and the imperative to develop transferable skills suited to rapidly evolving labour markets. Yet quality assurance of WBL in higher education remains considerably less developed, with only a small number of QA agencies having adopted specific regulatory frameworks tailored to WBL in the tertiary sector.

Our paper presents a case study of how the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) developed and introduced specific QA standards for dual studies following the enactment of Romania's new Higher Education Law in 2023. The Romanian dual studies model represents a distinctive institutional arrangement where learning, teaching and assessment responsibilities are equally distributed between the higher education institution and economic partner organisations. Economic partners are required to contribute financially to institutional infrastructure, provide pedagogically trained tutors, and commit contractually to hiring graduates, creating thus

conditions analogous to apprenticeship, without employment during study.

The paper analyses the key policy challenges encountered, examples used and lessons learnt by ARACIS in designing fit-for-purpose QA standards for this model, including defining WBL, allocating responsibility for academic standards between institutional and workplace settings, defining the division of learning outcomes at the level of individual disciplines, designing WBL that maintains a meaningful correlation between theory and practice, ensuring effective student support and mentoring, and managing the distinctive role of economic partners as co-assessors.

Drawing on comparative analysis of existing European QA approaches to WBL, the paper identifies common regulatory patterns and considers their transferability beyond Romania, reflecting on the fundamental tension between responsiveness to labour market needs and the preservation of academic standards and institutional autonomy.

PAPER 10: Beyond Employability: Student Experience and Pedagogical Challenges in Practitioner-Led Higher Education

Time: Thursday 19 November, 14.15 – 15.00

Room: POLY-QA 223 — Innovation Engine, Second floor

Presenter: Aida Ter-Ghazaryan, French University in Armenia

Chair: Gaga Gvenetadze

Abstract:

While in most higher education institutions, the relationship between academic training and the labour market is mediated through external employer involvement, much less attention has been paid to institutions in which professionals themselves constitute the main teaching body. At the French University in Armenia (UFAR), teaching across all programmes is delivered almost exclusively by active practitioners, creating a distinctive model of professionally oriented higher education.

This paper examines both the institutional mechanisms supporting this model and students' experience of practitioner-led teaching. Drawing on institutional quality assurance practices, graduate outcome data and a thematic analysis of open-ended student comments collected over several academic years, the study explores the opportunities and challenges associated with professional practitioners as the principal providers of teaching. Graduate outcome data confirms the strength of the model: 93% of Bachelor's graduates are professionally active, average salaries are approximately 40% above the national average, and 92% work in positions directly related to their field of study.

The findings indicate that practitioner-led teaching is highly valued for its practical relevance, professional expertise and strong connection with labour market expectations. At the same time, students express recurring concerns related to pedagogical methods, assessment practices and course coherence.

While UFAR has developed a comprehensive quality assurance framework to support the model, the analysis suggests that professional expertise does not automatically translate into pedagogical effectiveness or into coherent learning outcomes and assessment practices. When practitioners teach independently, without systematic academic co-teaching or formal content oversight, traditional

quality assurance mechanisms encounter challenges related to pedagogical coherence, assessment consistency and the definition and alignment of learning outcomes across programmes.

PAPER 11: Lifelong Learning and Micro-Credentials in European University Alliances: Emerging Approaches to Quality Assurance and Institutional Transformation

Time: Thursday 19 November, 14.15 – 15.00

Room: POLY-QA 225 — Excellence Forum, Second floor

Presenter: Ana Tecilazić and Ivana Verveger, Algebra Bernays University

Chair: Michael Hofer

Abstract:

Lifelong learning and skills development have become central priorities of European higher education policy, reflected in initiatives such as the Union of Skills agenda and the Bologna Process commitment to flexible learning pathways. Micro-credentials have emerged as a key instrument for supporting upskilling and reskilling needs, expanding access to learning opportunities and enhancing the responsiveness of higher education to rapidly changing labour markets. At the same time, European University Alliances have been positioned as laboratories for the transformation of higher education, experimenting with new forms of transnational educational provision and cross-border quality assurance. This paper presents the findings of a desk-based analysis of all 73 European University Alliances, including 65 funded alliances and 8 alliances awarded the Seal of Excellence. The study examines how lifelong learning and micro-credentials are embedded within alliance strategies, policy frameworks and quality assurance arrangements. Particular attention is given to the extent to which alliances have developed mechanisms to support the design, delivery, recognition and quality assurance of flexible learning opportunities across institutional and national boundaries. The preliminary findings reveal considerable diversity in the maturity and scope of alliance approaches. While some alliances have positioned lifelong learning and micro-credentials as strategic priorities supported by dedicated frameworks and quality assurance mechanisms, others remain at an earlier stage of development. The analysis also highlights emerging approaches to transnational cooperation in the quality assurance of flexible learning provision. The study represents the first phase of a broader research initiative exploring the contribution of European University Alliances to lifelong learning, innovation and skills development in Europe. The findings provide insights into how cross-border quality assurance can support the development of flexible learning pathways and strengthen higher education institutions' capacity to respond to evolving labour market and societal needs.

PAPER 12: From Formal Requirements to Institutional Learning? Quality Assurance, Employability and Academic Mission in Western Balkan Higher Education

Time: Thursday 19 November, 14.15 – 15.00

Room: POLY-QA Exchange, Second floor

Presenter: Kseanela Sotirofski, University Aleksander Moisiu

Chair: John Edwards

Abstract:

Higher education systems in the Western Balkans are required to tackle skill mismatch; brain drain and quickly changing labour market demands as well as contribute to innovation and economic and social development. At the same time, reform of quality assurance mechanisms in line with the European Higher Education Area raises expectations regarding employability, stakeholder involvement and program development informed by evidence. Even with these new expectations, not much is known about the way QA mechanisms contribute to institutional learning and universities' ability to turn external quality requirements into institutional development.

PAPER 13: Beyond Linear Measurements: Recognising Complex Capabilities for Future-Proof Employability in Higher Education

Time: Thursday 19 November, 14.15 – 15.00

Room: POLY-QA 222 — Trust Circuit, Second floor

Presenter: Berta Paz Lourido, European Observatory of Service-Learning in Higher Education (EASLHE)

Chair: Bryan Maguire

Abstract:

Employability is a central concern of higher education policy and quality assurance across Europe. Universities are increasingly expected to demonstrate their contribution to graduate preparedness for labour markets characterised by technological disruption, ecological transitions and growing societal complexity. Yet these transformations raise an important question: are quality assurance arrangements recognising the full range of capabilities required in an AI-mediated, ecologically constrained and socially complex world?

This paper presents a conceptual and policy analysis of tensions between understandings of employability and the forms of evidence privileged within quality assurance arrangements. Drawing on European debates on the revision of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), the paper examines whether approaches to employability remain sufficiently responsive to capabilities required in rapidly changing labour and societal contexts.

The analysis develops the concept of the Employability Recognition Gap (ERG), defined as the discrepancy between the complex capabilities required by labour ecosystems and societies and the forms of learning and graduate development that quality assurance systems are able to recognise and value. Rather than advocating a redesign of quality assurance frameworks, the paper adopts an evolutionary perspective and explores how principles and practices could broaden the evidence relevant to graduate preparedness.

To support future discussions, the paper introduces the Future-Proof Employability Pentagon (FPEP), a five-dimensional heuristic framework comprising capabilities, evidence, stakeholder engagement, learning contexts and enhancement processes. Rather than constituting a new accreditation model,

the framework is presented as a practical lens through which quality assurance systems may recognise complex capabilities while maintaining feasibility, comparability and trust.

The paper argues that the challenge lies in how quality assurance systems can recognise and mobilise broader forms of evidence in ways that remain feasible while responding to the scale and urgency of contemporary transformations in higher education and society.

PAPER 14: Between flexibility and assurance: a lean approach to internal QA for lifelong learning

Time: Thursday 19 November, 14.15 – 15.00

Room: POLY-QA 228 — Impact Lab, Second floor

Presenter: Luk Schoofs, Brigitte Loosen and Aaron Soens, Odisee UAS

Chair: Daniela Craciun

Abstract:

As higher education institutions expand lifelong learning (LLL), they face a dual challenge: ensuring robust and comparable quality assurance while operating in a diverse, fast-moving and resource-constrained environment. QA systems designed for degree programmes can become too heavy or fragmented when applied to flexible and modular LLL initiatives.

This paper presents a structured and lean approach to the internal quality assurance of LLL, integrating certified learning initiatives into an institutional QA cycle while contributing to a developing quality culture. Instead of adding a separate layer, the approach embeds QA as a lightweight thread throughout the lifecycle of LLL initiatives and shifts part of QA upstream, fostering ex ante quality development rather than relying predominantly on ex post control.

The methodology combines four components: an ex ante business case aligning initiatives with labour market trends, learner needs and institutional feasibility; learner personas to support portfolio management and programme design; a feedback phase involving professional stakeholders, programme committees and action planning; and a meta-reflection phase with external peers to support continuous improvement at system level.

The paper discusses the tension between maintaining a lean QA system and enabling bottom-up LLL initiatives. It offers transferable design principles for embedding LLL in internal QA systems while strengthening quality culture, portfolio-level governance and responsiveness to the world of work.

PAPER 15: Through the Learner's Eyes: Rethinking Quality in Digitally Enhanced Teaching and Learning

Time: Friday 20 November, 09.30 – 10.15

Room: POLY-QA 221 — Quality Nexus, Second floor

Presenter: Liia Lauri and Aleksandra Dolgopolova, Estonian Quality Agency for Education; Toomas Plank and Lehti Pilt, University of Tartu; Anneli Veispak, Estonian Business School

Chair: Gaga Gvenetadze

Abstract:

Digital learning has become a core infrastructure for higher education, yet quality assurance frameworks often translate learner experience into institutional or expert-defined criteria only indirectly. This paper presents findings from a national learner survey on the quality of e-courses in Estonian higher education, conducted in late 2025 by the e-course quality working group coordinated by the Estonian Quality Agency for Education (HAKA). Respondents were 438 learners from six universities and ten universities of applied sciences who were asked to assess which e-course features support learning the most, using 25 quality-related statements and open-ended questions.

PAPER 16: From compliance to institutional capacity: rethinking institutional review for innovation and societal engagement

Time: Friday 20 November, 09.30 – 10.15

Room: POLY-QA 223 — Innovation Engine, Second floor

Presenters: Maria Manatos, A3ES; Marie Gould, QQI Ireland

Chair: Michael Hofer

Abstract:

Institutional assessment is increasingly expected to address complex and interconnected dimensions of higher education (HE) quality: strategic governance, research-based innovation, stakeholder engagement, employability, lifelong learning, sustainability and institutional resilience. For quality assurance (QA) agencies, this raises a methodological challenge: how can review processes remain robust, transparent and evidence-based while also supporting institutional enhancement, diversity and responsiveness to changing societal, policy and technological contexts?

This paper brings together the ongoing redesign of institutional assessment in Portugal, with a comparative QA perspective from QQI Ireland drawing on experience with differentiated and proportionate institutional review models, including approaches tailored to smaller and specialist higher education institutions (HEIs).

The Portuguese case provides the starting point: an emerging institutional self-assessment framework that seeks to move beyond institutional description towards the evaluation of institutional capacity, including strategic coherence, internal quality assurance maturity, effective use of evidence in decision-making and improvement.

The comparative perspective with QQI Ireland is used to discuss transferability beyond the Portuguese context. Rather than comparing systems descriptively, the paper explores shared methodological questions for QA agencies: how to design review processes that are enhancement-oriented but credible, evidence-informed but proportionate, responsive to labour market and societal change but

respectful of academic autonomy and institutional diversity and capable of producing transparent outcomes that sustain public trust.

The paper identifies preliminary lessons for agencies seeking to redesign institutional assessment as a tool for institutional learning, innovation and public trust. It identifies key tensions for external QA: balancing accountability and enhancement, evidence and bureaucracy, common criteria and diversity, labour market responsiveness and the long-term public mission of HE, as well as the need to support system-level learning from review processes.

The paper also considers how institutional assessment can generate system-level insights to inform policy development and sector-wide enhancement.

PAPER 17: Future-proofing higher education through institution-owned quality assurance: lessons from the Flemish institutional review cycle 2019 - 2025

Time: Friday 20 November, 09.30 – 10.15

Room: POLY-QA Exchange, Second floor

Presenters: Dagmar Provijn and Cathy Hauspie, NVAO; Veerle Conings, Hasselt University

Chair: Sylvie Navarre

Abstract:

This policy paper uses the Flemish institutional review as a system-level case study to explore how external quality assurance can support future-proof higher education without prescribing one model of innovation, curriculum development or institutional quality assurance.

The paper draws on the overview report on the Flemish institutional review cycle 2019-2025 – an anonymised thematic synthesis of institutional review reports coordinated by NVAO Flanders between 2019 and 2025. A central feature of the Flemish approach is that the mechanisms, criteria, feedback loops and assurance practices used to safeguard educational quality are developed by the institutions themselves. NVAO's open and appreciative review approach does not impose a uniform QA model. Instead, it examines whether each institution's own conduct of QA is coherent, evidence-informed, stakeholder-sensitive and effective within its specific mission, context and stage of development.

The analysis shows that future-proofing higher education depends not only on visible educational innovations such as digital learning, interdisciplinary curricula or work-based learning, but also on institution-owned mechanisms that make educational development sustainable and demonstrable. Five transferable lessons are identified at the institutional level. First, institutions need clear mechanisms for translating strategic ambitions into programme-level practice. Second, institutions who are given autonomy to safeguard educational quality, benefit from defining transparent criteria for assurance, differentiated follow-up and escalation. Third, external stakeholders, including the world of work, should contribute to quality judgements rather than merely being consulted. Fourth, data-informed QA strengthens adaptability only when data are discussed and interpreted in light of the educational context, rather than treated as self-explanatory indicators. Fifth, trust in institutional ownership depends on effective feedback loops, formal assurance decisions and accessible public

information.

The paper invites discussion on how open external QA can respect institutional ownership while making accountability, societal relevance and future-proofing visible.

PAPER 18: Where Should Change Happen? Constructive Alignment as a Quality Assurance Tool for Responding to Employer Needs

Time: Friday 20 November, 09.30 – 10.15

Room: POLY-QA 225 — Excellence Forum, Second floor

Presenter: Varduhi Gyulazyan, Ruben Topchyan and Naira Harutyunyan, National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance, Foundation (ANQA)

Chair: John Edwards

Abstract:

Higher education institutions are increasingly expected to demonstrate responsiveness to evolving labour-market needs. Employer feedback is therefore often used to inform curriculum revision and programme enhancement. However, institutions may struggle to determine where changes should be introduced. As a result, employer requests can trigger broad programme-level modifications, including revisions of programme learning outcomes, new courses, or curriculum restructuring, even when more targeted changes would be sufficient.

This paper argues that constructive alignment can serve not only as a curriculum design framework but also as a quality assurance mechanism for managing programme change. Drawing on observations from programme accreditation preparation, curriculum mapping exercises, and constructive alignment reviews conducted with higher education institutions in Armenia, the paper examines how employer-driven requirements are translated into programme development decisions.

The paper conceptualises constructive alignment as a traceability chain connecting programme learning outcomes, performance indicators, course learning outcomes, assessment tasks, assessment criteria, and student achievement evidence. Analysis suggests that programmes with weakly articulated alignment structures often respond to employer feedback through broad and disproportionate curriculum changes. In contrast, programmes with clearly documented alignment are better able to localise change and identify the most appropriate level of intervention.

Findings indicate that employer expectations do not necessarily require changes to programme learning outcomes or curriculum architecture. Many adaptations can instead be addressed through assessment criteria, performance standards, feedback processes, or evidence requirements. In some cases, the assessment task itself remains valid, while revised criteria enable the evaluation of competencies increasingly valued by employers.

The paper proposes “localisation of change” as a quality assurance approach for responding to employer needs. It discusses implications for programme review, accreditation, and institutional quality assurance, arguing that constructive alignment can support more proportionate, evidence-based, and transparent programme adaptation while preserving academic coherence and integrity.

PAPER 19: Evaluating the Labour-Market Relevance of Micro-Credentials: Evidence from QA Agency ESG Aligned Practices

Time: Friday 20 November, 10.30 – 11.15

Room: POLY-QA 221 — Quality Nexus, Second floor

Presenter: Aleksandra Zhivkovikj, EQAR

Chair: Eva Fernandez de Labastida

Abstract:

This paper examines how EQAR-registered quality assurance (QA) agencies evaluate micro-credentials, with particular focus on labour market elements, using methodologies aligned with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG). Against the backdrop of swiftly evolving labour-market needs and the growing policy emphasis on upskilling and reskilling, the study investigates how external QA contributes to the cross-sector relevance and credibility of short learning opportunities.

The research adopts an exploratory design based on the systematic analysis of publicly available agency reports in the Database for Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR), complemented by an examination of the ESG-aligned methodologies used by the agencies themselves. Using qualitative text analysis software, the study focuses on single micro-credentials and identifies recurring evaluation patterns and thematic foci.

The first analytical component maps the characteristics of the micro-credentials included in the sample, considering workload expressed in ECTS, disciplinary fields, and the diversity of providers offering them – ranging - from higher education institutions to sector-specific training organisations and private companies.

Building on this descriptive foundation, the paper analyses how agencies assess labour-market alignment, both within their formal methodologies and in the judgments made by review panels. This analysis is structured around three key phases in the lifecycle of a micro-credential: design, delivery, and post-completion. It examines how panels evaluate needs analyses, employer involvement, and the articulation of skills and competences; how they assess delivery aspects such as work-based learning and practitioner-led teaching; and how they consider post-completion elements including learner tracking, graduate surveys, and employability outcomes.

Across these phases, the study highlights good practices identified by agencies and synthesises the recommendations issued, pointing to areas where provision can be strengthened.

Taken together, these findings contribute to ongoing discussions about how QA underpins lifelong learning ecosystems, reinforces trust in new forms of credentials, and supports integration and recognition of micro-credentials within flexible learning pathways.

PAPER 20: Designed for Whom? Accreditation Criteria and UAS Doctoral Education in European Binary Systems

Time: Friday 20 November, 10.30 – 11.15

Room: POLY-QA 223 — Innovation Engine, Second floor

Presenter: Johanna Krappe, University of Turku / Turku University of Applied Sciences; Michael Gille, Hamburg University of Applied Sciences

Chair: Urszula Lis

Abstract:

Across Europe, Universities of Applied Sciences are gaining formal rights to award doctoral degrees, and policy discussions on how to extend these rights are active in a growing number of countries. Universities of Applied Sciences occupy a distinctive position in this landscape: their doctoral programmes are characterised by strong links between applied research, professional practice, and industry, making them a critical site for quality assurance frameworks that aim to connect higher education with the world of work. As national systems design or review their approaches, quality assurance frameworks face a practical design question: are the criteria through which doctoral programmes are evaluated suited to the institutional forms and research orientations they are now asked to assess?

In this presentation we examine how accreditation criteria function in practice across three national systems that have each extended doctoral degree rights to UASs through different legislative strategies: Germany, the Netherlands, and Portugal. Drawing on analysis of quality assurance frameworks, accreditation requirements, and sector advisory documents from all three systems, this paper identifies a consistent pattern across divergent policy architectures: accreditation criteria tend to reflect the research traditions and institutional forms for which they were originally designed, regardless of the formal credential strategy deployed. The three cases differ in how this pattern operates, but they converge in what it means for institutions seeking to develop doctoral education with a distinct applied-research orientation.

Drawing on these three cases as a window into a broader European pattern, we propose a set of diagnostic questions for QA agencies and policymakers designing or reviewing doctoral credential frameworks in binary systems, addressing three dimensions: access conditions, research capacity assessment, and supervisory eligibility. These questions are designed to be applicable across different national starting points and governance contexts. We invite participants to test them against their own institutional or national experiences and to discuss what calibrating accreditation criteria to applied-research orientations would require in practice.

PAPER 21: Beyond Compatibility, Revisited: Quality Assurance to Foster Europeanisation. Evidence from the First Full Implementation Cycle of the Standards and Guidelines for Harmonisation in EUt+

Time: Friday 20 November, 10.30 – 11.15

Room: POLY-QA 225 — Excellence Forum, Second floor

Presenter: Rafael Toledo-Moreo, Emilija Zane Sarma and Timothée Toury, European University of Technology

Chair: Anna Gover

Abstract:

In an era of rapid technological change, evolving labour markets and growing geopolitical pressures, Europe's capacity for innovation and competitiveness depends on higher education institutions that think and act as genuinely European actors, responsive to continental needs while remaining grounded in regional and national contexts. This requires universities to transform not only their programmes but their processes, governance structures and institutional culture, so that quality, relevance and employability are pursued at a European scale.

European Universities Alliances are a key vehicle for this transformation. Yet quality assurance approaches have not kept pace, remaining largely rooted in national and institutional frameworks or focused on isolated joint activities, often limited to full-fledged study programmes. This creates a challenge for alliances seeking to monitor, support and evaluate deep institutional transformation across partner universities in all their mission areas.

Building on a framework previously presented at EQAF 2025, which proposed a quality assurance framework for fostering convergence in European Universities alliances and introduced the Standards and Guidelines for Harmonisation (SGH) developed within the European University of Technology (EUt+), this paper presents the framework's further developments and the results of its first full implementation cycle. EUt+, whose ambitions include European Degrees in Engineering, European Research Institutes and the full Europeanisation of its members, provides the empirical context. The SGH address ten standards spanning universities' full range of academic and institutional missions, from student access and European values to research, digital transition and external quality review, enabling institutions to assess how far they think and act as European universities. The complete cycle encompasses member Self-Assessment Reports (SERs), an External Evaluation Panel process, and External Evaluation Reports (EERs).

The paper presents findings on strengths, recurring challenges and lessons learned, offering insights for alliances, QA agencies and policymakers navigating the path toward deeply integrated transnational higher education.

Poster Presentations:

POSTER PRESENTATION 1: From Flexibility to Trust: Quality Assuring Lifelong Learning Pathways in Swiss Higher Education

Time: Thursday 19 November, 14.15 – 15.00

Room:

Presenter: Katrin Meyer, AAQ

Abstract:

Switzerland offers a compelling case for exploring how quality assurance can make lifelong learning innovative and trustworthy. Its higher education system combines many institutional types, strong links to practice and an established continuing education landscape: Certificates of Advanced Studies, Diplomas of Advanced Studies and Masters of Advanced Studies, alongside emerging micro-credentials. Institutional accreditation examines higher education institutions' internal quality assurance systems, giving Switzerland substantial experience in reviewing continuing education within institutional quality cultures. This poster frames quality assurance as a trust architecture connecting learners, higher education institutions and the world of work. It highlights key tensions — flexibility versus comparability, responsiveness versus robustness, and labour-market relevance versus academic responsibility — and asks how new credentials and advanced studies formats can be recognised, assured and connected to learner progression in ways that are transferable beyond the Swiss context.

POSTER PRESENTATION 2: Integrating complex Expectations: Building Future-Proof Higher Education in Estonia

Time: Thursday 19 November, 14.15 – 15.00

Room:

Presenter: Kaija Kumpas-Lenk, HAKA

Abstract:

In HE, multiple realities collide: students ask, "Why I`m learning that?", employers demand adaptable graduates, teachers question what to teach in an AI-driven world. Integrating various expectations into coherent, future-proof study programmes is challenging.

Estonia provides a case where policy, quality assurance and institutional practice align. By 2028 all Estonian programmes need to respond to labour market needs, integrate future-proof skills, support diverse learners. While the state provides direction and training, quality mechanisms support change, institutions are responsible for translating these principles into practice.

At TalTech, a comprehensive quality framework embeds these principles into programme design, teaching, and assessment. Future-proof competences e.g. critical thinking, collaboration, self-management and learning are systematically embedded across programmes. Supported by staff development and innovation structure TalTech SPIN promoting formats like Challenge-Based Learning. Alongside Green Deal Collider: Sustainable Futures, EuroTeQaThon are practiced.

POSTER PRESENTATION 3: From Labels to Barriers: Quality Assurance in Times of Crisis and Rapid Change

Time: Thursday 19 November, 14.15 – 15.00

Room:

Presenter: Viktoriia Rudyk, Nataliia Yakovenko and Antonina Novak, University "Kyiv school of Economics"

Abstract:

HE quality assurance often focuses on formal access, while barriers that limit meaningful participation, competence development and progression remain less visible. This poster proposes a conceptual shift from labels and fixed student categories towards barrier assessment as a quality assurance lens. The war has acted as a stress test, revealing how displacement, changing health needs, caregiving, military service, digital instability and rigid academic processes can prevent students from achieving the same intended learning outcomes through standardised pathways. Barrier Assessment asks where a barrier emerges, how it affects participation, which learning outcome must be preserved, what may be adjusted without lowering academic standards, and how implementation should be evidenced and reviewed. Concept is presented as a work in progress. KSE invites partners to explore its, co-develop QA indicators and examine how barrier-sensitive quality assurance can reduce educational loss, support competence development and enable fairer transitions from higher education to employment.

POSTER PRESENTATION 4: External Stakeholder Involvement in Quality Assurance of Microcredentials: A Framework for Higher Education

Time: Thursday 19 November, 14.15 – 15.00

Room:

Presenter: Izabela Savickiene, Vytautas Magnus University ; Aurelija Valeikienė, Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education; Nora Skaburskiene, Vilnius Gediminas Technical University

Abstract:

This poster presents a framework for analysing external stakeholder involvement in quality assurance of microcredentials (MC) at institutional and MC levels in higher education. The focus is on MC quality assurance system development, design, implementation, evaluation and improvement, while considering external quality assurance as a contextual layer influencing institutional quality assurance arrangements. The framework brings together dimensions that are often considered separately in MC quality assurance, including the purpose of external stakeholder involvement, their roles and intensity of participation. It addresses a gap in existing approaches, which often recognise external stakeholders as important contributors but provide limited means for analysing the types and depth of involvement, or how different forms and intensities of external views affect quality assurance processes. The framework may support institutional self-assessment, policy analysis and comparative inquiry across diverse higher education and national contexts, including those focused on lifelong learning.

POSTER PRESENTATION 5: EQAR Knowledge Base: a tool for system-level information on QA

Time: Thursday 19 November, 14.15 – 15.00

Room:

Presenter: Aleksandra Zhivkovikj and Aleksandar Susnjar, EQAR

Abstract:

The EQAR Knowledge Base is a transparency tool that offers information on quality assurance (QA) requirements, cross-border QA, the use of the European Approach for Joint Programmes and agencies operating in line with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG) in each of the EHEA member countries.

This poster presents the novelties in the EQAR Knowledge Base as a key step towards enhancing transparency, usability and policy relevance of information on QA across the EHEA, including information on QA of transnational education, micro-credentials and other relevant areas, as well as structural and content-related improvements, including clearer data structuring, regularised data collection with national authorities, and enhanced links with DEQAR.

The participants will provide feedback of the new features, test the new interface and learn how to use the information in their own data systems to contextualise the data as well as to make well informed decisions and policies.

POSTER PRESENTATION 6: EUR-ACE® as a QA bridge between engineering education and the labour market: the ARACIS Experience

Time: Thursday 19 November, 14.15 – 15.00

Room:

Presenter: Stefania-Maria Armaselu, ARACIS

Abstract:

EUR-ACE® label, implemented through the EUR-ACE® Standards and Guidelines for Accreditation of Engineering Programmes (EAFSG), offers a distinctive quality assurance model for engineering education: it defines eight learning outcome areas that graduates are expected to achieve, preserving institutional autonomy while promoting competences relevant to the evolving engineering profession and the European labour market expectations. ARACIS has been ENAEE-authorised since 2013 to award the EUR-ACE® label to Bachelor-level engineering programmes following its evaluation procedure. The poster illustrates how the EUR-ACE® framework strengthens employer engagement in ARACIS evaluations through the participation of employers in review panels and decision-making, analysing the universities' continuous dialogue with the socio-economic environment supporting programme monitoring and enhancement. The ARACIS experience demonstrates how a quality assurance agency can successfully integrate a subject-specific European label into its national evaluation process.

POSTER PRESENTATION 7: Generative AI and Quality Assurance in Dutch Higher Education: Enhancing an integral approach through thematic analyses

Time: Thursday 19 November, 14.15 – 15.00

Room:

Presenter: Kasja Weenink and Anouk Baars, NVAO

Abstract:

Generative AI is rapidly reshaping higher education and challenges both internal and external quality assurance. This poster presents NVAO Netherlands' research agenda for thematic analyses of Generative AI in higher education and quality assurance, building on a published initial analysis of panel review reports since 2010. The study shows a sharp rise in attention to Generative AI from 2023 onwards, but also an uneven and mainly assessment-risk-focused approach. The follow-up studies therefore examine whether programmes and review panels are moving towards a more integrated perspective, including programme alignment with changing labour market needs, developing learning outcomes, curriculum development, AI literacy of staff, achieved learning outcomes and constructive alignment. Specific attention is paid to review panels: what expertise, information and professional development do they need to assess responsible programme-level choices regarding Generative AI? The poster invites EQAF participants to reflect on QA and integrative responses to Generative AI in higher education.

POSTER PRESENTATION 8: Quality Assurance in Non-Linear Learning Environments: Lessons from Five Years of Educational Experimentation at the University of Bergamo

Time: Thursday 19 November, 14.15 – 15.00

Room:

Presenter: Vittorio Zanetti, Giuditta Pezzotta and Rebecca Cazzato, University of Bergamo

Abstract:

Higher education is increasingly moving beyond standardised educational models, with challenge-based learning, work-based experiences, interdisciplinary projects, peer learning and flexible pathways creating more dynamic learning environments. This poster explores how quality assurance (QA) can evolve from compliance-oriented and prescriptive approaches towards more adaptive and consultative models that support innovation while safeguarding academic standards. Drawing on a longitudinal analysis of five years of teaching methods documented in University of Bergamo syllabi (2021-2026), it examines how increasingly composite and non-linear learning configurations (pedagogical layering) expose limitations in conventional QA mechanisms, particularly in capturing practice-oriented and dynamically configured learning experiences. Using the metaphor of a shift from a "puzzle" to a "magnetic building set", the poster argues that stable QA functions increasingly rely on configurable forms of evidence and proposes a fit-for-purpose matrix that can helps institutions distinguish when standard QA instruments remain sufficient, when they require adaptation, and when complementary evidence is needed. QA should therefore become an enabling and dialogic companion to innovation, balancing accountability, comparability and sustainability with continuous competence development and changing societal and labour-market needs.