

# Quality procedures in European Higher Education

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## 'Lessons' from the ENQA 2008 survey and future directions

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## Objectives (why)

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- to present a summary of the main findings of the ENQA survey;
- to identify the main QA 'themes' that emerge from the findings;
- to identify the extents to which local and wider 'contexts' determine and can promote / constrain QA developments in institutions and agencies;
- to discuss the opportunities and barriers to more effective quality assurance;
- to identify where the most effective gains may be made in the further development of quality assurance;
- to identify likely paths for the development of QA in the next 5 years.

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## Authors of the quality procedures survey:

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- Nick Harris**, Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education (QAA), UK;
- Fiona Crozier**, Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education (QAA), UK, ENQA Board Member;
- Peter Cullen**, Higher Education and Training Award Council (HETAC), Ireland;
- Emmi Helle** and **Nathalie Costes**, ENQA Secretariat;
- Achim Hopbach\***, German Accreditation Council (GAC), Germany, ENQA Vice-President;
- Helka Kekäläinen**, Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC), Finland, ENQA Board Member;
- Božana Knežević**, University of Rijeka, Croatia, HEI representative;
- Josep Grifoll Sauri**, Agency for QA in the Catalan University System (AQU), Spain, ENQA Board Member;
- Tanel Sits**, member of the European Register Committee; former ESU representative, and
- Kurt Sohm\***, Fachhochschulrat (FHR), Austria, ENQA Board Member.

\* ENQA Board Member at the time.

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3  
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## Overview (how)

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- background;**
  - goals of the survey;**
  - survey organisation & methodology;**
  - findings;**
  - group working;**
  - summary plenary - 3 main points from each sub group;**
  - final discussions.**
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4  
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## Background

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### 1st ENQA Survey on Quality Procedures in 2003:

- ❑ Major progress was made towards convergence in basic methods & procedures despite varying national priorities.

### Significant developments in European QA have occurred:

- ❑ *Standards and Guidelines for QA in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* in 2005.  
**Common understanding of quality assurance.**
- ❑ *Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQEHEA)* in 2005.  
**Common understanding of learning outcomes.**

### 2nd ENQA project on 'Quality Procedures in European Higher Education' in 2007.

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## Goals

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- ❑ to update the 2003 survey;
- ❑ to assess the agencies' opinion about their compliance with Part 3 of the ESG;
- ❑ to survey agencies' external review plans;
- ❑ to survey agencies' attitudes towards the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

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## Organisation

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- Project run by HETAC and QAA;
- Steering group (4 members);
- Project group (9 members).

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## Methodology

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### 1st phase:

- Development of online questionnaire December 2007;
- Response deadline: 31<sup>st</sup> January 2008;

### 2nd phase:

- preliminary analysis: by May 08;

### Seven sections:

- introduction and background info about the HE system (10 questions);
- agencies' operations (14 questions);
- typical methodological approaches to external QA (14 questions);
- division of responsibilities & methodological framework (11 questions);
- self-evaluation by the institution (7 questions);
- reporting the outcome of agencies' external quality procedures and follow-up (9 questions);
- future developments (6 questions).

### 3rd phase

- Final analysis & report writing: by August 08.

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## Sample

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- ❑ 51 responses from 30 EHEA countries (2003: 36 from 23):
  - 28 Full member agencies (out of 34);
  - 7 Candidate member agencies (out of 11);
  - 11 Associates;
  - 5 Affiliates.

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## Survey 2008: key findings

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- ❑ New agencies continue to be established.
- ❑ Functions, objectives and priorities for agencies are changing (particularly in relation to the Bologna Process).
- ❑ Providing information on the quality of HE, as the main function, remains.
- ❑ Increased level of external involvement (stakeholder).

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Functions of agencies (some findings)	Responses %	Very/important
Quality assurance	97.7	93.2
Quality enhancement	97.7	90.9
External QA of programmes	100	84.1
Collecting/Disseminating information on quality	100	72.7
External QA of institutions	100	72.7
<i>Recognition/licensing of institutions</i>	95.4	57.1
<i>Development/Maintenance of discipline standards</i>	97.7	41.9
<i>Development/Maintenance of NQF</i>	97.7	41.9
<i>Deciding on the funding of institutions</i>	95.4	26.2
<i>Recognition of national diplomas</i>	95.4	42.9

11  
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## Findings: Consequences of QA

- ❑ External QA leads to formal consequences (e.g. approval, funding) in 90% of cases.
- ❑ HEIs are formally required to address recommendations at a rate of approx. 75% in evaluation procedures and audits, and at approx. 87% in accreditation procedures.
- ❑ All the most common types of external quality procedures are applied for these purposes.
- ❑ 'Formal consequences' - preparation for a formal decision made by another party.

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## Cross cutting themes

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- ❑ Most agencies have a national remit.
- ❑ The status of agencies remains formal & functions remain the same.
- ❑ 65% programme level procedures.  
40% institutional level.
- ❑ Evaluation, accreditation & audit – the most frequent types of procedure.
- ❑ The frame of reference for external quality procedures remains.
  - The impact the Bologna Process.
  - External QA done on a cyclical basis (cycles of five or six years).
- ❑ Funding from government/HEIs v. independence.

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## To sum up

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- ❑ The number of agencies is increasing.
- ❑ Many agencies are changing and broadening the traditional scope and type of activities.
- ❑ Students are increasingly being involved in the procedures.
- ❑ The survey shows, in different ways though, a change in emphasis: from assurance to enhancement.

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## Issues for group working

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- What kind of formal consequences different types of external QA lead to?
  - **Are the QA procedures fit for this purpose?**
- How do institutions perceive the co-existence of different external QA procedures?
  - **Do they benefit from coexisting external QA procedures with different purposes?**
  - **Would they rather prefer to have only one?**
- Is there a conflict between the ESG and national tradition/legislation?
  - **If yes, how could/should they be solved?**
- A change in emphasis: from assurance to enhancement.
- The extent to which things are 'moving on'.
- The most effective gains in the further development of QA may be made in ...
- Likely paths for the development of QA in the next 5 years.

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## Conclusion

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- Agencies today serve very different needs and different procedures.**

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