

External QA in Europe: context, trends and challenges

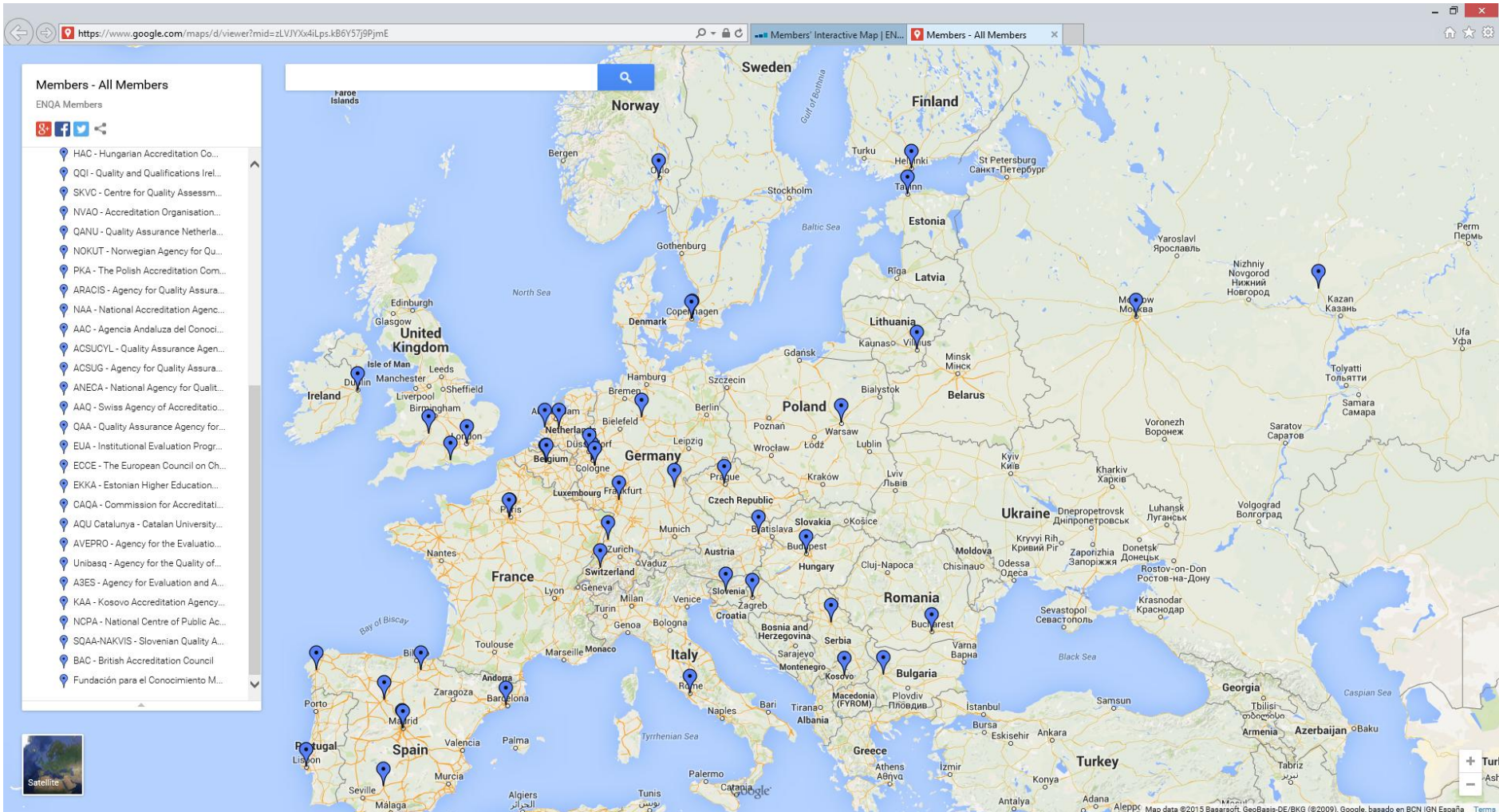
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What is ENQA?

- ENQA is the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
- ENQA is a **membership organisation** of external Quality Assurance Agencies
 - 49 members from 26 European countries
 - 47 affiliates from a further 15 countries
 - ENQA is representative of 41 of the 48 members of the EHEA
 - Affiliates in the USA, Ecuador, Hong Kong, Israel and Jordan
- The criteria for membership is that an agency undergoes a successful **external review** against the 2015 **European Standards and Guidelines** (ESG) every five years

ENQA – member agencies



The wider European context of HE

What is Europe?

- The **European Union** has 28 member states
 - The **European Higher Education Area** has 48 signatory countries (including all EU member states, and the European Commission) → a voluntary intergovernmental process (the “Bologna Process”)
 - **European Union**, through the European Commission, supports higher education reforms, and harmonization efforts, but in particular, since 25 years, student (and staff) mobility (to create “European citizens”)
 - Education policy, including HE, is **an area of autonomy of the EU member states**
- the European Union **can only support, add value, promote common agendas** etc. through funding and the “Open method of coordination” (benchmarking, European projects, studies, data...)
- Also for EHEA: **no legal tools to enforce implementation** (voluntary → peer pressure and support)

Different EQA Agencies and approaches in Europe

- Evaluation, audit, accreditation...
- Programme level and / or institutional level
- Subject specific / multidisciplinary methods and agencies
- European, national, and regional agencies

- Outcomes of quality assessments:
 - Permission to operate/award degrees
 - Impact on funding
 - Recommendations for improvement

- Compliance with standards vs. Excellence
- Profile building through thematic elements

- Main purpose always: accountability **and** enhancement (whatever the methodology!)

Diversity and constant evolution of QA

- Different levels of autonomy and capacity of HEIs for IQA
- Different levels of independence and capacity of QAAs for EQA
- Different cultural contexts, history, and traditions
- Innovation and the “QA pendulum”

→ **Need for a common framework:
the ESG (and EQAR)**



What are the ESG?

- **Standards and guidelines for quality assurance**, including:
 - IQA
 - EQA
 - IQA and operation of QA agencies
- **Generic principles** → allow for diversity of implementation (sufficient basis of trust)
- **Apply to all HE**, independently of place (TNE) or mode (elearning) of delivery
- **Focus on learning and teaching** (links to research)

PURPOSES

- **Set a common framework** for quality assurance systems
- **Enable the assurance and improvement of quality** of higher education
- **Support mutual trust** (→ recognition and mobility)
- Provide **information on quality assurance in the EHEA**

Most agencies in the EHEA have proven to be ESG compliant

The principles for QA in the EHEA (ESG)

- **HEIs have primary responsibility** for the quality of their provision and its assurance
- QA **responds to the diversity** of higher education systems, institutions, programmes and students
- QA supports the **development of a quality culture**
- QA takes into account the **needs and expectations of students**, all other stakeholders and society
- **Independence of QA agencies!**



Quality is never an accident; it is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, intelligent direction and skillful execution; it represents the wise choice of many alternatives.

(William A. Foster)

izquotes.com

EQA and IQA – a collaborative relationship

- Primary responsibility of HEIs for quality and quality assurance of their own provision
- Role of external QA is to:
 - Provide a way for autonomous institutions **to demonstrate their accountability externally**
 - **Support the HEIs in constant enhancement** of HE provision and its quality assurance
 - **Independent (of ministries and HEIs) QA agencies** as counterparts of autonomous institutions

Concentric circles, one smaller only for sphere of activity, not for importance!



Role and involvement of stakeholders in European QA

- Stakeholder participation is very important in the European HE and QA context:
 - The ESG
 - Drafting
 - Requirements on HEIs and QAAs → national and institutional level
 - EQAR
- Internal and external stakeholders
 - Students' participation at all levels is fundamentally important
 - Engaging academics (quality culture)
 - Employers/labour market
- Stakeholders participation in QA practices in the QAAs is important for the **transparency + accountability (of the QAA)**
- Stakeholders participation in the QA policy results in **co-responsibility and legitimacy of the process (and outcomes) of the QAA and the HE system**

Trends and challenges in European (E)QA

- Possible move to “**softer**” **approaches** (fitness-for-purpose), especially in well-established QA systems:
 - from programme to institutional approaches;
 - risk-based methods;
 - more flexible methods or methods based more on IQA/institutional priorities; etc.

BUT the picture is not univocal

- Going **beyond minimum standards** and find ways to measure and reward excellence (of different types!)
- Greater importance given to the quality, **usefulness and readability of reports** (competing with international or national rankings as information source?)

Trends and challenges in European (E)QA – cont.

- Adapting to the **requirements in ESG 2015**: “good practice” in many systems for several years BUT big changes are still ahead:
 - adapting to student-centred learning
 - student involvement
 - publication of reports
 - collaborative relationship with HEIs
 - QA of alternative delivery modes (elearning), etc.
- **Internationalisation of QA and QA agencies**
 - use of international reviewers (small systems, but not only)
 - networking (e.g. ENQA) → sharing of good practice and experiences, building QA policy
 - international collaborative projects
 - joint reviews or cross-border reviews

Trends and challenges in European (E)QA – cont.

- **External accountability of agencies** is widely accepted – and expected (ENQA/EQAR)
 - basis for better recognition of QA decisions (but not there yet)
- **Wider involvement of stakeholders** accepted and required, BUT
 - employer involvement is challenging
 - student participation stagnating
- By far most EHEA countries have now **an independent QA agency**, compared to a minority 10 years ago

BUT

- national contexts are strong and important
- different levels of implementation of the European tools



Thank you!

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