

Subject	External Quality Assurance
Module	Networks Of External Quality Agencies
Topic	3.5 European QA Networks

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA): A Long Genesis
3. ENQA and the Bologna Process
4. European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA)
5. Discussion
6. Summary

1. Introduction



This topic provides information about two European QA networks: European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA). You will observe the growth of ENQA from the time of the Bologna declaration in 1999. The topic also describes the role of ECA.

Objectives: European QA Networks

Upon completion of this topic, you should be able to

- identify the rationale behind the establishment of ENQA
- describe the role of ENQA in the QA aspects of the Bologna process
- identify the objectives and purpose of ECA

2. European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA): A Long Genesis

INQAAHE appeared in 1991 as an international network, in which members could be regional bodies or networks, both large and small. Europe is, and was then, a large and populous region, endowed with a certain dynamism, sense of national and collective identities, and significant higher education systems. By 1993 the air was filled with ideas for a distinct European association of quality agencies.

European nations were then pursuing a goal of collaboration and commonality in many activities and dimensions. The 1980s for Europe had been a time of change, of budgetary “rationalisation” in a number of HE systems. After a time, attention returned to the issue of quality in higher education, and to the need for multinational approaches to common problems. Predictably, government and HE institutions often pulled in different directions, on questions such as the sharing of information and the allocation of European money for policy development and cooperative projects.

A significant early venture in QA was the European Pilot Project for Evaluating Quality in Higher Education (1994-95). The European organisation for QA grew out of the Pilot Project, receiving a push in the “Recommendation of the European Council (98/561/EC of September 1998 on European co-operation in QA in higher education”

Subject	External Quality Assurance
Module	Networks Of External Quality Agencies
Topic	3.5 European QA Networks

and by the Bologna Declaration of 1999. The European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) was formed in 2000 to promote European co-operation in the field of QA. Among its key objectives was movement toward comparability among the various national QA systems of Europe.

In November 2004 the General Assembly transformed the Network into the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). The European Commission continues to provide grant support for the activities of ENQA.

3. ENQA and the Bologna Process

In the Bologna Declaration (1999) the European Ministers of Education committed themselves to establish the 'European Higher Education Area' by 2010. Over the course of more than a decade, ENQA has played an important coordinating role in the QA aspects of the Bologna process.

General Overview of ENQA and the Bologna Process

1999

The Bologna Declaration encourages, among other things, the European co-operation in QA of higher education with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies. Other important goals agreed in Bologna are easily comparable degrees, a system based on two main degree cycles (a third cycle has now been included), a common European system of credits (ECTS) and mobility of students and teachers.

2001

In 2001, the European Ministers of Education, meeting in Prague, invited ENQA to collaborate in establishing a common framework of reference for QA, which would directly work toward the establishment of a European quality assurance framework by 2010.

2003

Two years later, in Berlin, the Ministers recommended that ENQA contribute even more directly to the European QA process. In the Berlin Communiqué, ENQA received a dual mandate from the Ministers to explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer review system for QA agencies and to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on QA.

2005

In the Bergen meeting of May 2005, the European Ministers of Education adopted the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" drafted by ENQA. The Ministers committed themselves to introducing the proposed model for peer review of national QA agencies. They also welcomed the principle of a European register of QA agencies based on national review and asked that the practical aspects of implementation be further developed by ENQA in co-operation with EUA, EURASHE and ESIB, with a report back to the Ministers through the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG). In Bergen, ENQA was accepted as a new consultative member of the BFUG.

2007

Subject	External Quality Assurance
Module	Networks Of External Quality Agencies
Topic	3.5 European QA Networks

In May 2007, the European Ministers of Education met in London. One of the most notable decisions was the creation of a European Register for Quality Assurance Agencies (EQAR), which would be a voluntary and independent undertaking. They endorsed the creation of the Register as proposed by the E4 Group, with a report back to the Ministers through the BFUG. The Ministers recognised that there had been progress in the QA sector of higher education – especially in terms of student involvement. The London Communiqué encouraged the successful E4-organised QA Forums to continue annually.

See the Appendix for references to periodic communiqués on progress between 2000 and 2010 in the QA aspects of the Bologna Process

Source: http://www.enqa.eu/bologna_overview.lasso

4. European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA)

Where ENQA embraces all forms of EQA, the European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education (ECA) concentrates on accreditation, and **aims for the mutual recognition of accreditation and QA decisions** (a significant step beyond the basic comparability of systems).

The members of ECA believe that this will contribute to the recognition of qualifications in higher education and the mobility of students and graduates in Europe. It may also **eliminate the necessity of multiple accreditation for joint programs and institutions operating across borders**. ECA thus has a narrower scope than ENQA, but at the same time, mutual recognition poses a greater political and practical challenge.

Other aims of ECA are to:

- Encourage mutual learning and disseminate best practices in accreditation
- Provide transparent information on quality and support for internationalisation of institutions and students.

ECA members have signed 12 bilateral mutual recognition agreements and 4 letters of intent. They have also:

- Committed to a code of good practice.
- Committed to a set of principles for the selection of experts.
- Cooperated on projects to facilitate mutual recognition by increasing mutual understanding and trust.

ECA members have agreed to regard each other's accreditation tools and instruments as compatible and free of substantial differences.

This agreement toward mutual recognition is seen as “paving the way” to the signing of mutual recognition agreements. ECA members and government agencies that provide advice and opinion on the recognition of domestic and foreign qualifications (ENIC/NARIC) in six countries have signed a joint declaration on the 'automatic' recognition of accredited qualifications.

Since the mid-nineties there have been a number of studies on the comparability of European EQA systems, notably the procedural aspects. Less attention has been

Subject	External Quality Assurance
Module	Networks Of External Quality Agencies
Topic	3.5 European QA Networks

given to the comparability of standards, but the ECA focus on “tools and instruments” may portend a closer look at standards.

Mutual recognition based upon the “substantial equivalency” of accreditation or the absence of “substantial differences” is not new. It had existed for some time in the Washington Accord, the recognition vehicle for engineering accreditation bodies in English-speaking systems. In lieu of a complex analysis of several thousand individual programs, the basic recognition of degrees for licensing purposes is based on the equivalency of accreditation policy, criteria, and procedures.

Information on the ECA can be found at: <http://www.ecaconsortium.net>

5. Discussion

Discussion: ENQA

ENQA: Go to the ENQA website and refer to the list of documents.

<http://www.enqa.eu/documents.lasso>

In particular, review the “Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.”

[http://www.enqa.eu/files/ESG_3edition%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.enqa.eu/files/ESG_3edition%20(2).pdf)

Consider these questions:

- Which areas of this document or which individual provisions do you think would require the most time and work to implement and verify across a multinational array of national HE/QA systems? (as in Europe)
- Which areas or provisions would be more likely to elicit variations in national response or even resistance?
- What would likely happen if this European EQA framework was applied to the EQA system in your country?

6. Summary

This topic covered the following main points:

- By the early nineties, there had been considerable thought and discussion on the idea of a European association of quality agencies. Such an association would become a large member network within INQAAHE.
- The European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) was established in 2000 to promote European co-operation in the field of QA.
- The European Ministers of Education determined to establish the European Higher Education Area by 2010 in the Bologna Declaration of 1999. Over the course of more than a decade, ENQA has been a major player in the QA aspects of the Bologna process.
- ECA concentrates on accreditation, and aims, importantly, for the mutual recognition of accreditation and QA decisions. The ECA objectives are mutual learning, disseminating best practices in accreditation, providing transparent information on quality and supporting the internationalisation of institutions and students.