Subject	External Quality Assurance
Module	Networks Of External Quality Agencies
Topic	3.8 Eurasian Quality Assurance Network (EAQAN)

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1. Introduction

The Eurasian Education Quality Assurance Network (EAQAN) emerged during the past decade, as did a number of agencies and networks. You will learn about its aims and objectives, and history and social context influence the way in which members from different countries align with QA networks.

Objectives: Eurasian Quality Assurance Network (EAQAN)

Upon completion of this topic, you should be able to
- identify the aims and purposes of EAQAN
- identify the future challenges facing EAQAN

2. Creation of the Eurasian Education Quality Assurance Network (EAQAN)

When the USSR ceased to exist as a unitary state, the component countries wished to continue to enjoy the benefits of their close interaction over the years. They remained together in a loose association called the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in order to maintain cultural, economical, and political ties, including links in higher education. This continued interaction produced an international conference entitled "Harmonisation of Higher Education System of Evaluation & Quality in the Countries of Baltic and CIS", held in Kazakhstan in October 2004. The participants included the heads of the education management bureaus and accreditation bodies of the Russian Federation and the republics of Kazakhstan, Kirghizia and Estonia, as well as the notables of the Kazakh institutions.

The participants agreed to create the Eurasian Education Quality Assurance Network (EAQAN) to share information about higher education processes in the CIS countries, and to maintain ties within a group of countries that had more than a few similarities going into the post-Soviet era. This was of interest even to countries (e.g., the Baltic states) that relate more to ENQA, Bologna and to European issues.

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All the countries of the CIS (hence, of EAQAN) are eligible to join APQN or CEEN or ENQA (or more than one of these). Practically all CIS countries are moving in the direction of closer cooperation with Europe, particularly with ENQA. The Ministers of Education of European CIS countries, with the exception of Belarus, have signed the Bologna declaration and, at the time of writing, appeared to meet the requirements for admission to ENQA. Indeed, some of the CIS QA and accreditation agencies are the result of projects with significant partners in Western Europe.

However, the situation is different for the countries of Central Asia, since they are outside the European region (although Kazakhstan has been working toward signing the Bologna declaration. It may well be that a new QA Network may emerge from the countries of Central Asia. EAQAN could then be disbanded, with all its members joining networks better aligned to their current thinking, history and social context. Alternatively, EAQAN could continue in the form of a loose association, just as nations formerly within the British Empire found value in belonging to the British Commonwealth, despite their membership in more focused and active groupings.

The CIS countries each have their own standards and pace in the development of QA procedures and of higher education in general. In Russia, the accreditation processes are run by the National Accreditation Agency, under the direction of the Ministry of Education. There are independent agencies in Russia, but they are only authorized for specialised accreditation, while the government-related agencies can conduct institutional and specialised accreditation. Countries of Central Asia, with the exception of Kazakhstan, have not changed their laws around accreditation and still use the former Soviet QA system in the form of government inspection, the observance of license requirements, and government attestation.

3. Discussion

Discussion: Virtual Networks

Given the social nature of people, and the fact that this is a key reason for the creation of networks, how much useful work can be done electronically? To what extent is meeting face to face essential for effectiveness or a sufficient reason for creating a network? As most would agree, air travel has become more expensive, time-consuming, and less emjoyable.

4. Discussion

Discussion: Multi-country Networks

To what extent and in what ways can a multi-country network assist its national EQA members to operate internationally or to extend their influence?

5. Summary

This topic covered the following main points:

- EAQAN was created in Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan in October 2004. EAQAN unites the bodies of the CIS that provide external quality evaluation of higher education.
- EAQAN's main aims are to:
    - o share information about higher education processes of the CIS countries
    - o maintain ties among these countries, in view of their similarities in the post-Soviet era
- Almost all CIS countries are moving to cooperation with Europe, and particularly with ENQA, but this is not the case for the countries of Central Asia. As a result, it is possible that a new QA Network will emerge from the countries of Central Asia. EAQAN could then either be disbanded or continue to perform the loose association role it performs at present.