



10th European Quality Assurance Forum Taking stock and looking forward

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Workshop abstracts

QA in PhD programmes: the importance of stating the obvious

By Karen Vandevelde and Nele Bracke (Ghent University)

In many countries, external quality assurance systems monitor the entry, progress, structure and outcomes of BA and MA programmes. But what about the 3rd cycle? Without a national framework or external QA system, PhD training often wavers between an institution's educational policies and research policies, while a coherent QA framework could foster an ambitious quality culture. Some QA mechanisms may be obvious to some but contested by others, while every stakeholder takes for granted the issues relevant to their particular involvement – from supervision training and skills development to the PhD student's life cycle and examination standards. At Ghent University we have developed our own building blocks for a Doctoral Training Quality Assurance Framework – the result of an ambitious bottom-up exercise. In this workshop we will apply the same process in a nutshell – reduced from 90 days to 90 minutes and expanded from one institution to more than a dozen!

Back to the future: Taking quality assurance to the next decade

By Jill Whittingham, Ineke Wolfhagen and Diana Dolmans (Maastricht University)

Looking back over the last decade, higher education institutions have invested a lot of time and energy in building QA systems. Many institutions have succeeded in this challenge of setting up systems in which the educational quality is monitored by planned and systematic evaluation activities. In many cases this implies that systems are characterised by a structural and systematic approach. However, there is still work to be done as these systems do not always result in continuous improvement of educational quality. The future challenge will be to integrate quality assurance in organisational working patterns within different layers of organisations. This leads to the challenge: how to develop a quality culture that is characterised by open communication and close involvement of staff in continuous improvements of education? The workshop will illustrate this transition by providing the opportunity to share experiences, discuss different methods/activities, formulating tips to take quality assurance to the next decade.

How to change an external QA framework: exchanging good and bad practices

By Harald Schleuthle (evalag) and Thérèse Zhang (AEQES)

Several countries across the EHEA are in the process of reflecting on, or (re)designing, their national or regional QA framework. This workshop invites participants to discuss how stakeholders can contribute to renewing their QA system, and to reflect on different QA approaches in a changing and international environment. We invite participants to look beyond their national borders and exchange ideas and practices on the following three topics, which will be explored in small discussion groups:

1. The change process: How to set up an efficient and participative process that takes into account HEIs' and students' needs when changing the EQA framework.
2. The QA approach: How to identify a QA approach that fits the context and purpose while creating an appropriate balance between accountability and enhancement.
3. The international dimension: How to devise procedures and strategies for handling the growing international dimension of QA and recognition by other EQA bodies.

Possible developments for the European Register of quality assurance agencies ('Oxford-style debate')

By Colin Tück and Melinda Szabo (EQAR)

The session will bring together different views on the purposes and activities of the Register for quality assurance agencies. The discussion will feed into the ongoing self-evaluation exercise of EQAR.

EQAR was set up in 2008 by the E4 Group to manage a Register of quality assurance agencies. The main aim of the Register is to build trust between European higher education systems by facilitating the recognition of quality assurance decisions, providing a basis for governments to authorise higher education institutions to choose a suitable agency from the Register, promoting student mobility and reducing opportunities for "accreditation mills" to gain credibility.

Seven years after it was established the Register includes 40 quality assurance agencies (QAAs) that have demonstrated their substantial compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). While the number of registered agencies shows a clear progress, it is still to be seen whether EQAR plays a strong enough role in the trust building and further integration of higher education systems in Europe.

A debate on the role of EQAR will provide a productive way to weigh different views on the issue and to assess the logical arguments supporting each view.

Challenging the system: envisioning the future of quality assurance

By Delia Gologan, Cristina Fit (Executive Agency for Higher Education Research Development and Innovation Funding, Romania) and Anca Prisacariu (University of Helsinki)

Given the recent challenges in quality assurance across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the aim of this workshop is to provide, with the active involvement of the participants, the key global changing factors that will potentially influence the future of quality assurance.

Thirty key factors were predefined by the facilitators under the form of statements about events/elements that are predicted to determine global changes and influence the future of quality assurance. After becoming familiar with these starting factors, participants will have the opportunity to add new different ones in order to create a narrative of future scenarios on how quality assurance might develop given the global challenges the current status-quo is facing.

Therefore, the purpose of the workshop is to provide and facilitate a framework for the participants to envision and define scenarios for the future developments of quality assurance worldwide, but especially in EHEA.

Asking powerful questions and enabling participatory cooperation for developing creative improvements

By Vanja Perovšek and Katja Kamšek (University of Ljubljana)

The aim of the workshop is to:

- briefly present a unique setting for quality improvements that is based on using powerful questions and cooperating in small, interactive groups of people,
- enable participants to briefly experience the use of these methods.

An example of a quality-enhancement approach recently developed at the University of Ljubljana (UL) will be presented (enhancement-led visits). The approach was developed as an alternative to a more common approach of internal audits. The combination of asking powerful questions and working in small groups of participants is being used, which proved to be inspiring, supportive and meaningful for the participants and the faculties involved at the UL.

The participants will be invited to experience these methods by using powerful questions while working interactively, followed by reflection and discussion in order to exchange insights and suggestions for further development and to identify similar approaches in their own environments.