

Last modified: 09.01.2019

BOLOGNA THEMATIC PEER GROUP ON QUALITY ASSURANCE FIRST MEETING

Tbilisi (Georgia), 3 / 4 December 2018

Draft Minutes

List of participants

Delegation	First Name	Surname
Albania	Linda	Pustina
Belgium Flemish Community	Magalie	Soenen
Belgium Flemish Community	Axel	Aerden
Bulgaria	Kristiana	Dedikova
Croatia	Durdica	Dragojevic
Cyprus	Andreas	Papoulas
Czech Republic	Martina	Vidlakova
EI/ETUCE	Karin	Àmossa
ENQA	Maria	Kelo
EQAR	Melinda	Szabo
ESU	Gohar	Hovhannisyan
EUA	Helene	Peterbauer
European Commission	Klara	Engels-Perenyi
France	Solange	Pisarz
Georgia	Marian	Gambashidze
Georgia	Maia	Margvelashvili
Georgia	Nino	Popkhadze
Georgia	Nino	Shioshvili
Georgia	Nino	Svanadze
Georgia	George	Vashakidze
Georgia	Elene	Vekua
Germany	Katrin	Mayer-Lantermann
Hungary	Levente	Gönczö
Latvia	Linda	Upīte

Montenegro	Milica	Kavedzic
Montenegro	Tijana	Stankovic
Netherlands	Lineke	van Bruggen
Poland	Jakub	Brdulak
Romania	Radu	Damian
Slovak Republic	Andrej	Piovarci
Sweden	Agnes	Ers
BFUG Secretariat	Rocío	Iglesias de Ussel Rubio
BFUG Secretariat	Vera	Lucke

Apologies from Armenia, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, EURASHE, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Moldova, Serbia, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, UNESCO, United Kingdom (Scotland).

1. Welcome address by the Georgian Host and the 3 Co-chairs of the peer group

The Georgian host and Co-chair of Peer Group C on QA, George Vashakidze, welcomed the participants of the Peer Group on Quality Assurance in Georgia. He explained that Georgia entered in the EHEA in 2005 and since then successfully introduced ECTS, the Diploma Supplement and other Bologna instruments. Education is today the top priority of the political agenda and Georgia will continue the work on the NQF and the new registration system for HEIs. They are also working on a recognition format for distance learning. George Vashakidze concluded his welcome by stating that the participation in this group brings great benefit to Georgia.

Irina Abuladze, Deputy Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport welcomed the Co-chairs and Bologna Peer Group members. She underlined that education is the major priority of the government because of the importance of the development of human capital. In the beginning it was hard to imagine that mobility was possible and that Georgian qualifications could be recognized abroad. The mobility increases opportunities and will open even more opportunities to Georgian students. Georgia has acquired experience in EU-funded projects over the past years and supports the idea of European Universities. The next priority will be equity, to be able to provide service to all students. The aim of being part in this Peer Group is to improve higher education quality and that Georgia is not only a member, but a partner in this process. She closed her speech by welcoming everybody to the beautiful city and neighborhoods.

Mariam Jashi, Chair of the Education, Science and Culture Committee of the Georgian Parliament especially greeted the strategic partners like the European Commission, the UNESCO, EQAR and ESU and stated that Georgia's commitment in this Peer Group was based on the believe that human capital is the basis for the development of a country. She spoke about the EU-Georgia Association Agenda and the promotion of Georgia's quality assurance system based on the ESG and the successful implementation of the recommendations.

The other Co-chairs of the Peer Group on QA thanked the Georgian host for their hospitality, providing a guided tour and dinner the day before and a beautiful conference location for the

meeting. They explained that the work in Peer Groups is a new format for everyone within the BFUG and that some participants in this meeting are BFUG members, others are new. This meeting should at the beginning give an overview on how this process was developed within the BFUG and BICG.

The agenda was adopted without modification for the first day, the second day was modified as follows:

- 9.30h Outcomes of the round tables & further discussion
- 10.30h Design of country action plans (walk around session)
- 11.30h Bilateral/multilateral discussions on cooperation within project proposals (EU and non-EU funded projects) part 1
- 12.30h Lunch break
- 13.30h Bilateral/multilateral discussions on cooperation within project proposals (EU and non-EU funded projects) part 2
- 14.00h Redesign of country action plans
- 14.30h Design of work programme/action plan for the peer group
- 15.30h Wrap up of the first meeting & way forward
- 16.00h End of the meeting

Attachment: TPG_C_QA_AU_CH_1_Agenda.pdf

2. Key commitments within the Bologna Process & Creation of the peer group structure within the Bologna Follow Up Group (Klara Engels-Perenyi, DG EAC European Commission)

Klara Engels-Perenyi, member of the BICG, explained with a ppt presentation that one of the main outcomes of the Paris Ministerial Conference was the need for support for better implementation. She showed the work plan of the BFUG for 2018-2020 with its different groups and mentioned the implementation report that will be descriptive as two years is not long, but an important period to work on this. She explained the process of creation of the peer groups and the European Commission's call for projects. In this peer group on QA, the stakeholder involvement and cross-border element of QA are fundamental, and the peer learning activities should be organized as follows: countries who need support can ask other countries for their support. She explained the terminology and stated that the reversed peer review and peer counselling is more focused on one single country. The participation in the peer groups is a voluntary process and countries with a clear need seem to be open to ask for peer support. The whole peer group will meet 2-3 times within the lifetime of the project and the role of the Co-chairs is key for communication within the peer groups. Their role is to encourage the countries to share their national viewpoints as this concept is completely based on sharing information. The EHEA website (www.ehea.info) will upload the work programme and results of this peer group. She concluded her presentation saying that quality assurance is the basis for trust in the EHEA and that agencies should therefore work in compliance with the ESG.

Attachment: TPG_C_QA_AU_CH_1_BICG.pdf

3. Bologna Implementation Report 2018 & overview on indicators on QA (Melinda Szabo, EQAR & Bologna WG1 Monitoring)

Melinda Szabo, member of WG1 on Monitoring, presented the Bologna Implementation Report (<http://www.ehea.info/cid105400/wg-monitoring-2015-2018.html>) and explained that on the basis of the work done by the Advisory Group on Dealing with Non-Implementation in the working period 2015-2018, three peer groups on the Bologna key commitments “A Three-Cycle System compatible with the QF-EHEA and first and second cycle degrees scaled by ECTS”, “Compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC)” and “Quality Assurance in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)” were agreed on by the BFUG and established after the Paris Ministerial Conference in May 2018. As time is short until the next Ministerial Conference in June 2020 the Monitoring WG will not have time to collect new data for the implementation report 2020 so countries will be asked to update their data and the report will focus on the descriptive level. Unlike previous reports, the 2020 Implementation report will focus on main developments and trends in the EHEA, covering the main waves of reform or development in the thematic area, highlighting both advances in implementation and main difficulties in achieving progress. Melinda Szabo added that the commitment of the BFUG members is important to achieve results in these groups.

Attachment: TPG_C_QA_AU_CH_1_Implementation.pdf

4. Defining the subthemes of the peer group, application of KA3 projects & way of working with the group members (Magalie Soenen, Co-chair Belgium/Flemish Community)

Magalie Soenen, Co-chair of Peer Group C on QA, presented the peer groups and co-chairs that were established on the basis of the information collected in summer 2018 by an online survey. Although the peer groups are established and started working, countries can still join the peer groups in the process. As this format is new to everyone, the group and co-chairs have to find the best way of working together with all the members. The next meetings will be held in Cyprus and Belgium. Online meetings of smaller groups will be organized in between. There will be a single webpage for each Peer Group on the EHEA website that will be available in a few weeks.

This Peer Group has now to create a work plan which is going to be based on the national work plans of each single country that is part of this group. The countries take engagements on the basis of their interest and next year the whole group will see what has been done and report back to the BICG and BFUG. Magalie Soenen presented the following schedule for the group:

- Work plan to be sent to the BICG by 31 January 2019
- Interim report by 30 June 2019
- Draft final report by 15 February 2020

The identified subthemes are:

- Legislative framework in line with the ESG;

- Ensuring effectiveness of internal quality assurance arrangements, including the use of QA results in the decision-making process and quality culture as well as links to learning and teaching;
- External quality assurance;
- The role and engagement of stakeholders in QA (students, teachers, employers);
- Cross-border QA;
- European Approach to accreditation of joint programmes.

To the knowledge of the Co-chairs, two umbrella projects have been submitted by the Peer Group members in the EC call and two projects on subthemes. Belgium Flemish Community has submitted three projects and Romania one.

For the umbrella project on the organization of the Peer Group meetings Magalie Soenen asks all the group members to keep the flight tickets and accommodation invoices that will be collected in case the project gets accepted and receives funding.

The second umbrella project for the whole peer group focuses on staff mobility between Ministries and QA agencies. The staff mobility is flexible in all directions (Ministries can visit QA Agencies or Ministries and can be visited by Ministries or QA Agencies), which should be an effective way of responding to the needs of the countries. All countries can send and receive staff. After approval of the project, a call will be launched to collect applications from all countries and a matchmaking committee will be established to pair the countries on the basis of their engagements/needs/offers. The level of staff members is not defined and two staff mobilities per country are foreseen (Ministry and QA Agency, or both from the same organisation). Stakeholders can be involved in the staff mobility programme. If the project gets approved, the call for applications will be sent in May/June 2019 and by September 2019 the answers should be collected. The staff mobility would take place in autumn/winter/early spring 2019/2020 and all the reports on staff mobility should be collected by May 2020. The staff mobility can be reimbursed to the group members for a maximum of 14 days.

Belgium Flemish Community has submitted a third project proposal called “Developing a European Approach for Comprehensive QA of (European) University Networks” whose overall aim is to support QA agencies in addressing evolving methodological challenges by developing supra-institutional QA procedures. The project is going to explore various approaches to holistically assess the quality of (European) university networks and to demonstrate the feasibility of organising assessments of (European) university networks on the basis of an assessment methodology that takes into account all supra-institutional policies. The project partners are Albania, Armenia, Belgium Flemish Community, Bulgaria, France, Georgia, Italy, Latvia, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Sweden and Switzerland.

Attachment: TPG_C_QA_AU_CH_1_Projects_BE_fl.pdf

Radu Damian, Director of the Quality Evaluation Department of ARACIS, the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, presented the strand 1 project “Support to the implementation of EHEA reforms – 2018-2020” that Romania has submitted in the EC call. He explained with a ppt presentation that the project aims at supporting the activities of Peer Group C.

The consortium led by the Romanian Ministry of National Education as national authority, includes 3 European organizations ENQA, representing QA agencies, EURASHE representing professional higher education institutions and associations (EURASHE) ESU representing student unions (ESU), and 5 quality assurance agencies from Romania, France, Bulgaria, Denmark and the Republic of Moldova.

The main activities of this project will be the discussion with various categories of stakeholders on their involvement in QA and on stakeholders' expectations and the sharing of best practices among QAAs. A study at EHEA member countries level will be elaborated, mapping the involvement of stakeholders in EQA activities and identifying examples of good practice and agencies will participate in peer review activities that will include several workshops. The peer-review activities will be organised in Denmark and Romania. In addition, a peer-learning activity will be organized.

The partnership in the project is constituted both from Erasmus+ Programme and Partner countries. A Guideline on involvement of stakeholders will be developed and each partner agency will analyse how it can be applied in its own activities. The Guideline will be available online.

The expected impact is promoting the diversification of stakeholders' involvement in QA activities across EHEA and providing the means for making the involvement of stakeholders effective. The project is expected to bring important changes in the practices of QA agencies related to stakeholders' involvement. On the long run the expectation is to aim at increasing participation of stakeholders.

Attachment: TPG_C_QA_AU_CH_1_Project_Romania.pdf

After the presentation of projects there was time for questions and answers. Questions concerning the communication within the peer group, among the subgroups and the synergies between the projects were raised and answered with the confirmation that the Co-chairs will facilitate the communication process among the single countries and projects and that the regular peer group meetings will help to keep the whole group informed on each project and to create synergies. In addition, one representative of the Co-chairs will participate in all the BICG meetings and will exchange with the other Peer Groups on the other key commitments.

The European Commission announced that there will be a second call for project proposals that will be published in the end of May with application deadline in the end of the summer. The set-up of this call will be very similar, and the consultative members will also be eligible as project applicant. The signature of the Ministry will not be necessary anymore.

5. Tour de table of expectations/engagements of the different countries

All the present countries and stakeholder organisations quickly presented themselves and announced the subthemes in which they were most interested.

After the tour de table, the Co-chair (Belgium Flemish Community) explained that representatives of QA agencies and Ministries are involved in this Peer Group and take part in the meetings, it is up to the countries to decide who should be the representative in this

group. The countries can come with two representatives to the meetings if they feel this need.

6. Discussions in parallel round tables on different subthemes

The participants divided into parallel sessions on different proposed subthemes.

6.1 Legal framework and ESG (chaired by ENQA)

The group discussed about three main issues:

The first one is that the ESG has to be translated into national standards, and for this purpose it has to be discussed in every country, which is a long-term process if it is done in a proper way. The group also emphasized that ESG is not a law, but a living document that needs to be discussed at national level. For this process it is important to understand where the ESG comes from.

Secondly, it is important to safeguard QA agencies' independence not only from ministries but also from institutions and stakeholders. Countries share the same obstacles in the attempt to reach such independence. One possible solution may be the internalization of stakeholders, even though it is complicated to adopt such a measure in small countries having financial limits and linguistic barriers. Many agencies are not financially independent either.

The third issue was that ESG is not a checklist tool, but it should be rather used in a clever way. Moreover, the group highlighted that agencies are meant to be constructing QA, rather than checking it.

6.2 European Approach to joint programmes (chaired by NVAO)

The *European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes*, that was adopted at the Ministerial Conference in Yerevan in 2015, seems to be difficult to implement. Not many countries have the European Approach explicitly in the legal framework. The QA agencies seem not able or willing to undertake the approach. Some of the national systems are still requiring an additional obligatory part of external QA (e.g. assessment of quality of thesis; QA reports need to be in national language, etc.). These measures undermine the benefits of the European Approach. Participants told about challenges with the European Approach when countries outside the EU are involved in the joint programme.

The group discussed what can be done to help the implementation of the European Approach and these are some ideas that came out of the discussion:

- Develop a toolbox or guidelines to explain the European Approach and facilitate its implementation;
- Disseminate good practice;
- Observation missions;
- Give examples in legal texts that can be used as inspiration for other countries;
- Identify people that can help in the implementation of the European Approach. The contacts of these people within the ministries could be put on the Ministries websites;

- Use EQAR website for information provision: <https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/>.
- Learn from projects like <http://impea.online/>: IMPEA has a study that including an overview of the EA implementation issues and is planning to develop an online toolkit, as a set of recommendations and proposed solutions for the policy makers.

6.3 Stakeholders engagement (chaired by ESU and ETUCE)

The representative from ESU introduced the group underlining the importance of providing a definition of “stakeholder”. On the other hand, the representative from ETUCE stressed the importance on how stakeholders’ activity should be managed. The group shared the improvements and difficulties they face while implementing this in every country and several issues were discussed:

- Institutions need to work with stakeholders who are representative bodies, otherwise there can be lack of autonomy or conflict of interest. A possible solution is that agencies limit any type of conflict of interest;
- In some countries there is no legal framework to involve stakeholders;
- The group highlighted that interest of stakeholders is lacking. Stakeholders get more involved if they have the feeling that their work does really change something and does have an impact;
- Capacity building of stakeholders: even if improvement measures are implemented, sometimes they seem to be lacking the relevant knowledge. It is complicated to know how they should be treated and what type of procedures should they undernote;
- Internal QA should have peer support, so that stakeholders can understand what they are doing. The most efficient strategy is not to judge each other but to support each other;
- The necessity or not of having labor market stakeholders in every kind of panel and the kind of training they need.

To sum up, the main discussion points were what a stakeholder is, how can countries and institutions engage them and if their participation is relevant or not.

6.4 Internal QA (chaired by EUA)

The representative from EUA introduced the *European Standards and Guidelines* (ESG) and underlined that with these standards the higher education institutions themselves have the responsibility for QA. The institutions should have an overall commitment for quality, not only quality assurance, but also quality enhancement. Internal QA is the basis for external QA and the most important aspects are transparency and involvement at all levels.

The group discussed about measures that can be taken to put what is in the ESG into practice:

- Exchange of experiences among the countries;
- Exchange good practice in terms of training and national seminars with the whole system (e.g. annually);
- Stakeholder involvement depends on what the HEI wants to achieve, experience exchange would be appreciated;

- Handbook;
- Exchange on the possibility of including all kinds of academic staff (academic, students, professors);
- Enhancing quality culture by communicating about the process. Quality culture is an informal process, so the right atmosphere should be created;
- Exact policy and process need to be adapted and should be publicly available;
- Every institution needs to define what student-centered-learning exactly means and how students can be involved in all processes;
- A helpful tool could be the EQUIP project with webinars, study, different tools: <http://www.equip-project.eu/>.

The group further discussed that the ESG is built on the idea that HEIs are autonomous and about how these internal QA structures can be implemented where the autonomy of institutions is restricted.

Another topic was the mind-shift that takes place in some countries where they went from programme accreditation to institutional accreditation which gives ownership to the institution as there is no external commission controlling, but a bottom-up approach.

6.5 External QA: institutional and programme accreditation (chaired by EQAR)

Most of the EHEA member countries have adjusted their higher education system by developing quality assurance frameworks. The development of these frameworks have differed from country to country, as quality assurance systems are rooted in academic traditions and national legal frameworks. The outcomes of quality assurance procedures may sometimes lead to a decision permitting a programme or institution to function, or it may function as an advice to the higher education institution or programme on how to improve. The focus of QA on programme or institution, on the type of external QA (evaluation, accreditation, audit, certification), the purpose (enhancement and accountability) have been defined and internalised differently from country to country.

The group discussed their different national quality assurance frameworks and how they have designed their system to meet the larger higher education objectives, and how this best fits the country's context, on how stakeholders were involved in this process and current changes being made to the quality assurance system to align it with the ESG.

The participants discussed the required changes in the laws to implement external QA and align it with the ESG. In some countries such legal changes rest with the Ministry, sometimes this is done by consultations of independent experts, or through a national consultation with stakeholders. Many countries have noted that they are in the process of revising their quality criteria or that they are changing their focus in external QA (either to institutional audit, or to institutional and programme evaluation); some countries noted their new QA agencies are currently being established and that they are working towards developing the internal and external QA in line with the ESG.

EQAR maintains on its website a knowledge base with information on the national external quality assurance requirements for each EHEA country, information on registered QA agencies that operate in that country, the possibility of HEIs within that country to choose suitable EQAR-registered agencies and if HEIs can employ the European Approach.

6.6 Cross-border QA (chaired by NVAO)

The representative from NVAO (Belgium Flemish Community) defined the three types of cross-border quality assurance:

1. Incoming QA where HEIs choose any EQAR registered QA agency who visits them;
2. Outgoing QA where QA agency goes to another country to evaluate foreign HEI;
3. Outgoing QA where QA agency goes to another country to evaluate a HEI from their own national system.

In the discussion with the group, there seem to be two main challenges for cross-border QA: legal requirements and methodological issues.

Concerning the legal requirements, most of the countries allow foreign QA agencies to evaluate their HEIs. The question was raised how this process could be facilitated. Concerning the outgoing QA, the discussion went around the question on how to accommodate outgoing QA in the legal framework.

Exchange of good practice that leads to results among the EHEA countries could be useful.

Concerning the methodological issues, the countries exchanged which standards they use and what type of procedure they apply. Some countries are not open to cross-border QA and some only accept cross-border QA after the full evaluation from the national QA agency. At the end the participants discussed on how QA agencies can cooperate with each other.

7. Design of country action plans (walk around session)

The participants of this Peer Group meeting were asked by the Co-chairs to think about the concrete actions that their country will take related to their participation in the peer group. They were asked to translate their general engagement in real action by starting from the implementation report looking at the points they still have to work on. Some examples were given for actions that could be taken:

1. The participants could talk to the BFUG representative of their countries or to their authorities about the engagement;
2. They could organize a national peer learning activity or international conference;
3. They could think about bilateral or multilateral actions;
4. They could participate in the staff mobility of the Peer Group's project.

The participants were asked to write all their ideas on a poster. In a second step they were asked to write on other posters in which specific fields they can offer peer support and in which part they would like to receive peer support.

8. Bilateral/multilateral discussions on cooperation within project proposals (EU and non-EU funded projects)

The participants were asked to walk around, read the posters of the other countries, discuss and see where they could cooperate with other countries and institutions. They were asked to look around to get new ideas from other countries and stick post-its on the items they were interested in cooperation.

Some suggestion from the Co-chairs were that the participants could think about regional initiatives for the countries who offer peer support as travelling to all the countries is very time-consuming and they were asked to please share information about initiatives with them. Pictures were taken and will be shared with all the members of this Peer Group via e-mail.

9. Redesign of country action plans

On the basis of the work done on the posters, the countries were asked to write their country input on a template provided by the Co-chairs. These inputs will serve as the basis of the work plan of the peer group and as such they will be added in annex to the work plan of the overall group.

The input is structured as follows:

- Please identify here for your country the challenges (if relevant) or describe the situation in the respective key commitment;
- Please describe here for your country the progress to be achieved by June 2020;
- Please list the concrete actions you want to undertake to achieve the set engagements (e.g. surveys, self-assessment, peer assessment, analysis, workshops, conferences, ...).

Action	Partners from the peer group	Partner from the own country	Outcomes	Contribution of the activity to the implementation of the key commitment	Timeline	Supporting project

The inputs of each country should be sent via e-mail to the Co-chairs by 15 January 2019 as the work plan of the whole Peer Group needs to be sent to the BICG by 31 January 2019.

10. Wrap up of the first meeting & way forward

The Co-chairs wrapped up the meeting and summarised the timeline for the next activities:

- Country inputs to be sent to the Co-chairs by 15 January 2019;
- Work programme of Peer Group to be finished by 31 January 2019;
- End of February feedback from European Commission on selection of projects;
- **Next Peer Group meeting will take place in Cyprus on 27 and 28 May 2019.** All the subthemes, initiatives and projects will report back to the whole Peer Group at this meeting and if anybody has ideas or suggestions for the agenda of the meeting, please contact the Co-chairs;

- A **PLA on the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes** (topic decided during the feedback round) will be organised **on 29 May 2019** tied to the meeting in Cyprus, so the whole meeting will take three days.

After a feedback round with very positive comments on the interactivity of the meeting and the format, the Co-chairs thanked the Georgian hosts and all the people that were engaged in the organisation of this meeting.