

QA Development Roadmap: Implementing the European Framework for the Comprehensive Quality Assurance of European Universities

<i>3rd draft</i>

1. Introduction

The purpose of the QA Development Roadmap is to outline the pertinent issues for implementing the European Framework for the Comprehensive Quality Assurance of European Universities, taking into account the lessons learnt from the EUniQ pilot evaluations and the reflections from the project partners and European Universities. First, a set of principles underlying the QA of European Universities will be outlined. These principles guide the roadmap for the implementation of the European Framework for the Comprehensive Quality Assurance of European Universities. In this roadmap the different steps that would need to be taken for the implementation are described. Finally, the roadmap should include an infographic that is deemed informative by European QA agencies, ministries, European Universities and European stakeholder organisations.

2. Principles for implementing quality assurance for European Universities

The following principles should guide the implementation of the European Framework for the Comprehensive Quality Assurance of European Universities:

1. The internal and external quality assurance for European Universities should be compliant with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).
2. The European University has primary responsibility for the quality of its provision and its assurance (ESG 2015: p.8).
3. External quality assurance for European Universities should respect the internal quality assurance arrangements as well as the diversity (ESG 2015: p. 8), academic freedom and autonomy of the alliances and the constituent higher education institutions.
4. The focus of the ESG is on “quality assurance related to learning and teaching in higher education, including the learning environment and relevant links to research and innovation” (ESG 2015: p.7). Similarly, the evaluations of European Universities should include all missions of the European Universities (education, research, innovation, service to society), whilst respecting that each alliance determines its specific mission and strategy. The evaluation should not question the choices made by the alliance but focus on the quality assurance of its implementation.
5. Evaluations of European Universities should focus on the joint provision of the alliance, and not assess the constituent institutions, their programmes or courses; this is the domain of the national quality assurance systems.
6. Quality assurance arrangements for European Universities should respect the agreements and commitments made in the EHEA Ministerial Communiqués, including the implementation of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes and the national acceptance of results of evaluations and accreditations carried out according to the European Approach by EQAR-registered agencies. Joint programmes provided by European Universities could be assessed by applying the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. The evaluation of a European University providing joint

programmes could support and simplify this assessment, e.g. by taking a positive evaluation of the European University as sufficient proof for the fulfilment of the European Approach standards on Eligibility (standard 1), Admission and Recognition (standard 4), Transparency and Documentation (standard 8), and Quality Assurance (standard 9).

7. The application of the European Framework for the Comprehensive Quality Assurance of European Universities should remain flexible to accommodate the further development of European Universities, the desire for stronger synergies between the higher education dimensions of the EEA, ERA and EHEA, and the results of European studies on the feasibility of joint European degrees and further European cooperation on quality assurance and automatic mutual recognition (Council conclusions on the European Universities initiative, 17 May 2021).
8. The implementation of the European Framework for the Comprehensive Quality Assurance of European Universities should also be beneficial for higher education institutions and joint programmes provided outside the alliances, in line with the position taken in the Council Conclusions of May 2021 that clearing obstacles in transnational cooperation for European Universities can also benefit other transnational cooperation among higher education institutions.
9. In accordance with the principle in cross-border quality assurance that higher education institutions can choose an EQAR-registered agency for carrying out external quality assurance procedures, European Universities can also choose one, two or more EQAR-registered agencies for the coordination of the evaluation according to the European Framework for the Comprehensive Quality Assurance of European Universities.
10. National authorities should consider how the results of an evaluation according to the European Framework for the Comprehensive Quality Assurance of European Universities can be used in national QA procedures involving European Universities, e.g. in institutional external QA procedures of the constituent higher education institutions of a European University and in external QA procedures of programmes jointly provided by a European University.
11. The ultimate aim of the implementation of the European Framework for the Comprehensive Quality Assurance of European Universities is that European Universities can be externally evaluated with one European Framework and one corresponding suitable QA procedure instead of being subject to multiple (national) QA frameworks and procedures that may be conflicting, burdensome or less suitable for European Universities.

3. Roadmap for the implementation of the European Framework for the Comprehensive Quality Assurance of European Universities

The primary beneficiary of the implementation of the European Framework for the Comprehensive Quality Assurance of European Universities (in short: the European Framework) are the European Universities, including their students, staff, partners and stakeholders. An evaluation according to the European Framework will contribute to the European University's quality enhancement and accountability efforts and the development of their internal QA system and culture. European Universities and their stakeholders, and coordinating EQAR-registered agencies with their panels of independent experts are the main actors from the perspective of quality enhancement.

The second purpose of the evaluation according to the European Framework is to support the fulfilment of national and European QA requirements by providing evaluation results from one European QA procedure so that the burden of multiple QA procedures for European Universities can be reduced as much as possible. The main actors in the evaluation itself are still the European

Universities and the coordinating EQAR-registered agencies. However, the involvement of national authorities and QA agencies in partner countries is necessary so that the evaluation results can be used in external QA requirements in a way that overlap and duplication in multiple procedures can be avoided, and external QA of the joint provision of the European University is carried out with the criteria that are most suitable for the transnational cooperation of the European University. National higher education systems will benefit when their higher education institutions face less obstacles for joining the transnational cooperation in European Universities.

Students and graduates of European Universities benefit when an evaluation according to the European Framework facilitates the recognition of their qualifications, including new, non-traditional ones as micro-credentials. The evaluation results according to the European Framework may increase confidence in the quality when recognition authorities take recognition decisions regarding the provision of European Universities.

To make the implementation of the European Framework successful, and to engage national authorities fully in the process of implementation, it should be supported by the European Commission and Member States and aided through peer learning in the Bologna process, e.g. through the BFUG Peer Support Group on QA. European organisations for QA agencies (ENQA, EQAR), students (ESU), higher education institutions (EUA, EURASHE) and the NARIC Network all have an important role to play in supporting the implementation of the European Framework and increasing the awareness among its stakeholders.

The multiplicity of stakeholders makes the possible pathways for the implementation manifold and complex. Successful implementation is also dependent on future, yet unknown, policy initiatives of the European Commission, the Council and the Bologna Process. A pragmatic way to reduce uncertainty and complexity is to look at the implementation through the eyes of European Universities as the primary beneficiaries: what steps do they need to take to start an evaluation according to the European Framework, and which other stakeholders need to be involved in this effort?

Step 1: Discuss and decide what the main benefits of using the European Framework are for your alliance, e.g.:

- 1) Contributing to the enhancement of the internal QA of the European University.
- 2) Demonstrating the fulfilment of relevant and appropriate criteria for European Universities and promoting the quality and reputation of your European University internationally.
- 3) Supporting the fulfilment of national and European QA requirements by providing evaluation results according to the European Framework so that the burden of multiple QA procedures can be reduced.

Step 2: Clarify the expectations of your alliance for the evaluation in view of the benefits you perceive (see Step 1). Create a short list of EQAR-registered agencies that you may select for coordinating the evaluation based on your expectations, relevant partner country and agency information on the websites of (D)EQAR, ENQA and agencies, and other aspects that the alliance deems relevant (e.g. costs, experience, duration and approach of the procedure). Select one, two or more of shortlisted EQAR-registered agencies for coordinating the evaluation.

***EQAR and QA agencies** could assist the selection process by including information on the European Framework as well as experiences and approaches of agencies on their websites.*

Step 3: After the selection of the coordinating agency/agencies the evaluation procedure may start (see section 4 in the European Framework). In view of the national acceptance of the evaluation results the alliance should be attentive that the coordinating agency/agencies inform all QA agencies related to the partners on the procedure.

*The **European Commission and national authorities** could consider how evaluations according to the European Framework can be stimulated, e.g. by co-funding more evaluations with the European Framework.*

***QA agencies**, in cooperation with **European Universities**, could develop a new project to raise awareness and provide additional guidance (e.g. through an online toolkit) for certain aspects of the procedure that are deemed relevant for European Universities (e.g. information provided to the panel) and QA agencies (e.g. the training of experts and report-writing aimed at enhancement).*

Step 4: The full evaluation report should be published by the coordinating agency/agencies (on the agency website and in DEQAR) in accordance with ESG 2.6. The partner institutions of the alliance inform the national authorities and QA agencies of the evaluation outcome.

***National authorities and QA agencies** could consider how the evaluation results according to the European Framework can support the national (institutional or programme) external QA procedures of joint provision by a European University. For instance, in national external QA procedures of partner institutions the positive evaluation results according to the European Framework could be taken as sufficient proof of quality for the joint provision of the European University. This would prevent multiple assessments of the same joint provision of the European University, whilst provision of partner institutions that is offered outside the European University is still subject to the national QA requirements.*

*The evaluation results could inform **national recognition authorities** on the quality of joint provision when making recognition decisions.*

*Recommendations from the **European Commission** to promote the application of the European Framework as well as peer learning among **national (recognition) authorities and agencies** (through initiatives of the **BFUG, ENQA, EQAR, NARIC network**) could foster the QA and recognition processes and (through stakeholder organisations such as **ESU, EUA and EURASHE**) raise awareness among the main stakeholders.*

4. Infographic

[To be developed in October 2021, after feedback on the implementation steps from the conference participants].