CURRENT PRACTICES ON EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE OF ACADEMIC RECOGNITION AMONG QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES

The fair recognition of qualifications, periods of study, and prior learning (to which we will refer in this report as "recognition for academic purposes" or "academic recognition") has been one of the main objectives of the Bologna Process since its creation. The Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) sets up some agreed common operating principles that are legally binding for the concerned countries.

However, according to the 2015 Bologna Process Implementation Report, after two decades of existence, implementation of the LRC is still a challenge. In particular, students are still facing major barriers to mobility because of imperfect academic recognition of periods of study, certificates, diplomas, and degrees obtained from another national system or institution. Even though the situation varies between countries (with different legal frameworks and bodies involved), several reports make it evident that academic recognition in European higher education is largely in the hands of higher education institutions. The fact that higher education institutions are autonomous, and the signatory countries have limited capacity to bind them to the principles of the LRC, is identified as a major challenge.

As the 2015 Bologna Process Implementation Report states, this issue has been taken up in the context of improving quality assurance (QA) and in particular was addressed in the revision of the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The ESG 2015 (standard 1.4) explicitly considers academic recognition as an essential component of the internal quality assurance (IQA) system of a higher education institution:

Fair recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study, and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, are essential components for ensuring the students' progress in their studies, while promoting mobility. Appropriate recognition procedures rely on:

- institutional practice for recognition being in line with the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention;

- cooperation with other institutions, quality assurance agencies, and the national ENIC/NARIC centre with a view to ensuring coherent recognition across the country.

With the adaptation to the ESG 2015, it is clear that QA agencies now have responsibility for addressing academic recognition issues in their external quality assurance (EQA) processes. ENQA has taken up the challenge of exploring the current and potential role of QA agencies in improving institutional recognition practices as well as developing suitable strategies to support QA agencies in this task.

The ENQA working group on quality assurance and recognition

In line with ENQA's 2016-2020 strategic plan, which envisions "a European Higher Education Area where students have access to high quality education and can achieve qualifications that are respected worldwide", and aware of the new responsibilities for the quality assurance sector embedded in the 2015 version of the ESG, ENQA established a working group on quality assurance and recognition in July 2015.

The activities of the group in its two years of existence have focused on mapping current practices concerning the external quality assurance of academic recognition among ENQA agencies, identifying challenges and best practices, and developing strategies to disseminate the group's research.

Members of the working group

Teresa Sánchez Chaparro, CTI, France (chair of the working group)
Carme Edo Ros, AQU Catalunya, Spain
Eva Fernández de Labastida, Unibasq, Spain
Marie-Jo Goedert, CTI, France
Kyrre Goksøyr, NOKUT, Norway
Esther Huertas, AQU Catalunya, Spain
Maria Kelo, ENQA, Europe
Niamh Lenehan, QQI, Ireland
Rafael Llavori de Micheo, ANECA, Spain
Aurelija Valeikienė, SKVC, Lithuania

This working group worked under the coordination of Lindsey Kerber, from the ENQA Secretariat.

Methodology

The following activities were conducted by the working group during its two years of existence:

- Selecting and considering relevant publications and initiatives (EU-funded projects of particular relevance to the scope of the working group) regarding the European Area of Recognition and its challenges with implementation (see Chapter 5);
- Conducting an exploratory survey to QA agencies in September 2016. The results and conclusions of this study are presented in Chapter 2 of this report. The full text of the survey is included in Annex 1; and
- Organising a dissemination and consultation event aimed at exploring the links between quality assurance and recognition and addressed to three target communities: QA agencies, higher education institutions, and ENIC-NARIC centres. The

event, hosted by QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland, an organisation which comprises both the QA agency and the official ENIC-NARIC centre in Ireland) and entitled "Exploring synergies between quality assurance and qualifications recognition", took place in Dublin on 1-2 June 2017. Chapter 3 provides an account of the main conclusions, while the full event programme and list of participants are available in Annexes 2 and 3 of this report.

You may read the complete document in the following link.