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# **Quality assurance: building trust and confidence in Cross Border Higher Education, a perspective from Europe**

## ABOUT ENQA

- 62 full members and likely to grow as agencies align with European Standards and Guidelines
- 42 affiliates with some likely to become full members
- The policy body for external quality assurance in Europe
- Represents member quality assurance agencies in policy dialogues in the European Higher Education Area
- Provides services to members to support development and for stakeholders in developing QA policy
- Works with members to drive the development of policy & practice in quality assurance & enhancement

**ENQA's  
members &  
affiliates  
safeguard  
quality for 32.9  
million students  
in the European  
Higher  
Education Area**

# THE COMPLICATED WORLD OF CROSS BORDER HE

- Opportunities: international collaboration; widening access; graduate mobility
- Challenges: multiple forms; little shared language or understanding; guaranteeing quality

## A simpler focus for today:

- Transnational education – an institution from one country delivering programmes in another country
- Cross border collaboration - joint/dual programmes delivered in partnership by institutions from more than one country
- Cross border accreditation - a ‘market’ approach whereby institutions choose an accrediting body from another country to suit their purposes. 3

## A SIMPLIFIED VIEW OF CROSS BORDER QA

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**QA of TNE:** When an agency from the ‘sending’ country verifies the quality of the provision of an institution based in its country in the ‘receiving’ country

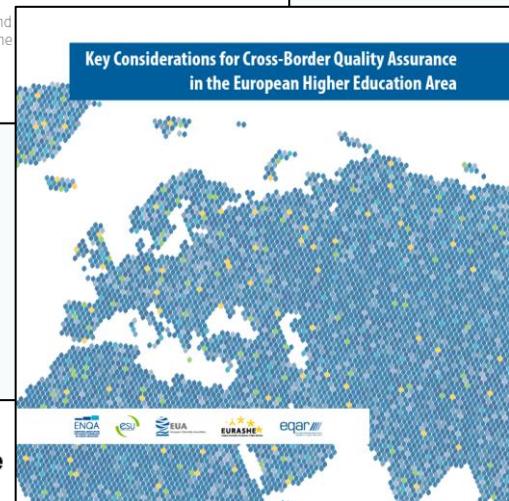
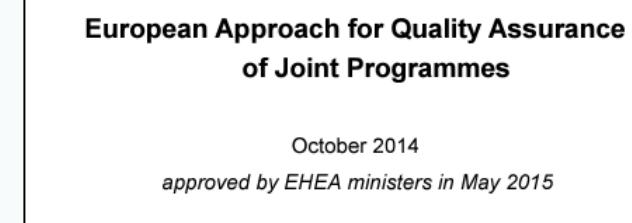
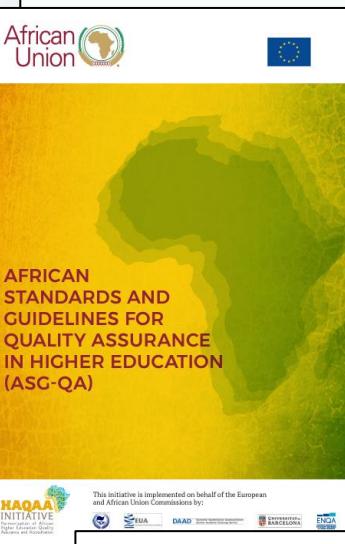
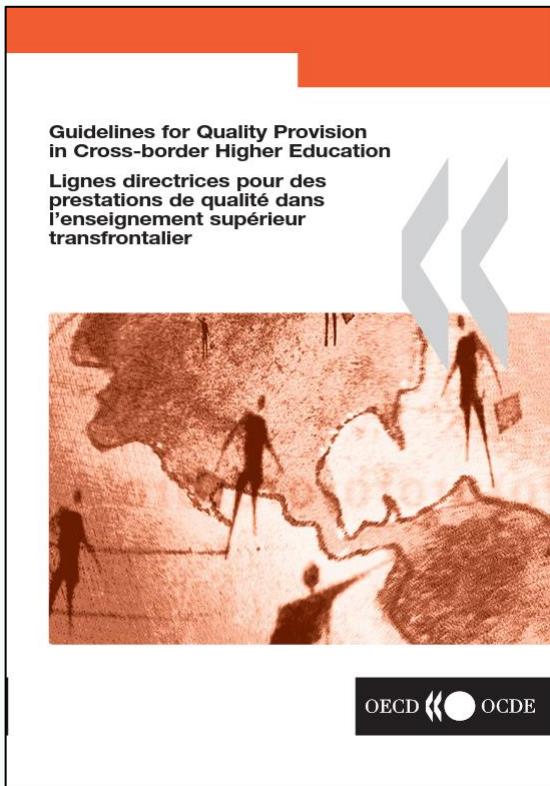
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**QA of joint and dual degrees:** When a single exercise is conducted to verify the quality of a partnership of two or more institutions, conducted by a single or multiple agencies

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**Cross border accreditation:** When a QA agency from one country accredits an institution in another country to replace or supplement national rules, for brand reputation or quality enhancement

# EXISTING QA TOOLS & FRAMEWORKS



# TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION



# CONCERNS ABOUT QUALITY OF TNE



Is the education the same standard as in the home country?



What adaptations should be made to the local context?



Will qualifications be recognised in the home country?



Are students receiving value for money?



How are stakeholders involved?

# BACKGROUND AND POLICY CONTEXT (I)

enqa.



## 2013-16 QACHE project

‘Quality Assurance of Cross-border Higher Education’

Toolkit with principles and recommendations for agencies and networks of agencies

## 2023 ENQA paper

Highlighted lack of transparent implementation of existing guidelines, need for clear roles and responsibilities, and for individual agencies/countries to take the lead

## 2024 Tirana Communiqué

EHEA Ministers committed to promoting a...

*‘more robust and transparent quality assurance of transnational education delivered worldwide, in line with the ESG, to protect the interests of students.’*

# BACKGROUND AND POLICY CONTEXT (2)

## Lisbon Recognition Convention

- 2022 monitoring report includes TNE
- Council of Europe and UNESCO are working on the new Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education in the framework of the LRC Committee

## Global Recognition Convention

- the Operational Guidelines, include provisions and guidance on TNE
- 2025 agreement to develop a draft subsidiary text on quality assurance, including that of transnational education

## OECD/UNESCO Guidelines

- 2025 monitoring report concludes patchy awareness and implementation
- Recommendation to focus on strengthening use rather than updating the guidelines

# SOME VIEWS OF TNE FROM OUTSIDE EUROPE



Albert Chow, HKCAVQ  
(Hong Kong)

“Key benefits include broadening of educational experiences in terms of quality, pedagogies and domain of programmes, especially when they are not available locally. Key risks include monitoring, adaptation of TNE to local context, especially where statutory or professional requirements exist.”



Martin Strah, CONEAU  
(Argentina)

“Ensuring the quality of programs within Argentina is an unavoidable public policy and is related to the national recognition of degrees and subsequent professional practice. Foreign institutions wishing to offer their programs within the country must undergo a rigorous evaluation process...”



Olusola Oyewole, AAU  
(Africa)

“The expertise needed for ensuring the quality of transnational education is quite different from that of internal institutions... Protection of the learners is an issue that needs to be the concern of all but now, the learners are open to the exploitations of various institutions.”

## BROADER CHALLENGES FOR TNE

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Lack of data is a real problem

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Even where regulatory frameworks do exist, the definition of TNE varies

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Additional guidelines are in development for QA and TNE under the Lisbon and Global Recognition conventions.

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OECD surveyed their states and confirmed that awareness and implementation of the OECD/UNESCO guidelines is patchy.

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ENQA has concerns about the various initiatives to produce more guidelines etc, without real tools to ensure implementation.

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ENQA's ROQA-TNE activities will focus on encouraging transparency and information provision.

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## ENQA'S ROQA-TNE PROJECT

Led by ENQA, the Robust QA of TNE project will focus on TNE delivered by sending institutions in the EHEA to receiving countries outside the EHEA

The project will:

- Explore and map current approaches to the QA of TNE by EHEA
- Facilitate the exchange of experience and peer learning, and share examples of good practice,
- Extend, update and disseminate guidance on QA of TNE for QA agencies
- Support QA agencies in reflecting on their own policies and methodologies

# QA OF JOINT AND DUAL PROGRAMMES

Opportunities: for students to learn in different cultures and environments, and for institutions to share expertise and draw on expertise

Challenges: funding for students, and institutions operate within constraints of their own national contexts, legal and regulatory requirements

The 'European approach' to QA of Joint Programmes was developed to make this simpler, but systems do not often 'talk to each other' due to national requirements.

Ministers have asked that the European approach to QA of Joint Programmes will be updated as the ESG are revised.

QA agencies as enablers - ENQA work with the European Commission on QA for the 'European degree label' for joint programmes offered by European University Alliances

## CROSS BORDER QA BY AGENCIES

**‘...cross-border QA refers to external QA activities of a QA agency carried out in a country other than the one in which it is based or primarily operates. For higher education institutions, this may be a voluntary process or part of the national mandatory external QA’**

- Key Considerations for Cross-Border Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area



## THE EUROPEAN POLICY COMMITMENT

In the framework of the Bologna Process, cross-border QA is supported, and in the Yerevan Communiqué (2015) ministers in charge of higher education in the EHEA committed to allowing :

***“higher education institutions to use a suitable EQAR registered agency for their external quality assurance process, respecting the national arrangements for the decision making on QA outcomes”***

## BENEFITS OF CBQA (I)

Offers HEIS the possibility to

- identify an agency that best suits their own mission and profile, and which can in turn best meet their own needs
- strengthen the institutions' internationalisation policies and develop their collaboration with other foreign institutions
- help improve the recognition of their qualifications
- increase stakeholder engagement, strengthening the institutions' own responsibility for quality and the external acknowledgement of the institutions' efforts

as identified in 'key considerations'

## BENEFITS OF CBQA (2)

For QA agencies, cross-border QA may provide

- a possibility to expand their national and international profile and gain prestige
- an increase in income
- learning opportunities to improve their own processes and methodologies
- the ability to promote continuous improvement within their specific field

as identified in ‘key considerations’

## BUT THERE ARE ISSUES

- Not all countries have opened-up their systems to the possibility
- Even where countries have, there are practical/administrative barriers
- Open markets makes agencies financially unstable
- Some agencies have not accounted for the local context
- Concerns that the ‘market’ undermines emerging national agencies
- Are agencies using the ENQA & EQAR ‘brands’ for non-ESG activities
- Marketing activities that seek to discredit fellow agencies
- Are HEIs choosing for quality, or simply on price- the risks of ‘accreditation shopping’ are agencies cutting corners to win on price
- Desk based accreditation across continents

## ADDRESSING CONCERNS

- The ESG are under review for adoption by Ministers in 2027
- There are proposals to have a stronger standard on professional conduct
- As part of the Bologna ‘Thematic Peer Group’ on QA, ENQA is developing a ‘code of conduct’ on CBQA
- ENQA will strengthen its guidelines for review of agencies in relation to lines of enquiry on CBQA and to operate in line with the revised ESG

## IN SUMMARY



Cross border higher education offers huge opportunities for students, institutions and broader stakeholders in HE



Quality assurance is central to ensuring it is trusted by students, governments, employers, and the public at large

## SELECTED FURTHER READING

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ENQA paper to European Quality Assurance Forum on protecting interests of students in TNE.  
[Gover Blackstock-TNE-paper.pdf](#)

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ENQA (ed). 2015. Cooperation in Crossborder Higher Education: A Toolkit for Quality Assurance Agencies. Brussels, Belgium. [https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/QACHE-Toolkit\\_web.pdf](https://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/QACHE-Toolkit_web.pdf)

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ENQA, ESU, EUA, EURASHE, EQAR. 2017. Key consideration for Cross-border Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. Brussels, Belgium. [www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/Key Considerations-CBQA-EHEA.pdf](http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/Key%20Considerations-CBQA-EHEA.pdf)

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European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. Approved by EHEA ministers in May 2015.  
[https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/European-Approach-QA-of-Joint Programmes\\_Yerevan-2015.pdf](https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/European-Approach-QA-of-Joint%20Programmes_Yerevan-2015.pdf)

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OECD and UNESCO. 2005. Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education. Paris, UNESCO. <https://web-archive.oecd.org/2012-06-15/147238-35779480.pdf>

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