

14-15th September 2023

II FORUM of European Universities Alliances

THEMATIC SESSION VIII

Friday 15th September 11:30h-13:00h

European Quality Assurance and Automatic Recognition System

INTRODUCTION

Robust, future-proof quality assurance is crucial to the successful achievement of a **European Education Area**, including regarding **the success of the European Universities initiative**, developing a joint European degree for joint programmes, developing micro-credentials, achieving automatic recognition, and meeting evolving higher education sector needs.

The objective of a **European Quality Assurance and Recognition System**, announced in the [European Strategy for Universities](#), is for quality assurance to be better connected with the recognition of qualifications and learning periods abroad. The aim is to move further towards **institution-level** and, where relevant, **alliance-level quality assurance**, based on well-developed **quality culture** at institution and alliance levels, in order to facilitate deeper **transnational cooperation** and **mobility**. It should also boost the full implementation of the 2018 **Council Recommendation on automatic recognition of academic qualifications and learning periods abroad**.

In co-creating this initiative with stakeholders, the Commission is building on what has already been achieved in both quality assurance and recognition, at both EU and Bologna levels.

In **quality assurance**, this includes **Article 7 of the [Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation](#)**, which Member States adopted in 2022 and which focuses on quality assurance of joint programmes.

In **recognition**, this includes the [Council Conclusions on further steps to make automatic mutual recognition in education and training a reality](#), adopted by Member States in May 2023, which respond to the [recognition report](#) published by the Commission on February 2023. This report examined progress in the implementation of the **2018 [Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad](#)**.

Despite considerable progress, consultations, studies and surveys are showing that more remains to be done. Therefore, throughout 2023, the Commission is carrying out stakeholder consultations, with the objective of presenting a proposal for a **European Quality Assurance and Recognition System** in 2024. The Commission is also closely following the Erasmus+-funded study [QA-FIT](#) and the work of the Bologna Thematic Peer Group on Quality Assurance, supported through the Erasmus+-funded IMINQA project.

PURPOSE OF THE SESSION

The purpose of this session is to exchange views on the co-creation of a **European Quality Assurance and Recognition System**, in order to ensure that it meets the evolving needs of the higher education sector, including alliances of higher education institutions involved in deep transnational cooperation such as **European Universities**, their students, staff and stakeholders.

The session will highlight the importance of quality assurance and automatic recognition for the achievement of the European Education Area in general and transnational higher education cooperation in particular. Panellists will share their experience of good practice and first steps, such as the Erasmus+-funded EUNIQ project, and consider what more needs to be done. They will also consider the need for quality assurance procedures to reflect the evolving higher education landscape, in particular the green and digital transitions and fundamental academic values.

The session will build on consultations and surveys already carried out, in order to develop **concrete recommendations** on the priorities and content of the upcoming proposal.

Participants will have the opportunity to ask questions and share their views and experiences.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

This session will address key issues, such as:

- What needs to be done at institutional, national and European levels to ensure appropriate and fit-for-purpose, but not burdensome, quality assurance arrangements for European Universities and other transnational alliances?
- Could an alliance-level quality assurance mechanism – building on the Erasmus+ EUniQ and IMINQA projects – contribute to facilitate deeper quality enhancement of transnational cooperation and more joint activities/programmes? What are the necessary steps to build such an alliance-level QA mechanism?
- How could internal and external quality assurance systems of higher education institutions address better issues of fundamental academic values, automatic recognition of learning mobility activities abroad, the mainstreaming of green and digital skills across programmes and levels, and innovative pedagogies?

SESSION OUTCOMES

The discussion took place in an enthusiastic and creative atmosphere. Panel members highlighted the importance of **flexibility, trust, and simplification** in quality assurance processes for European Universities and the need for greater use of **existing tools** for both quality assurance and recognition. It was agreed that **cooperation between governments, universities, and agencies** is essential for effective quality assurance and recognition. European Universities can be trailblazers, particularly with regard to work towards a **joint European degree label**.

Una Europa has been piloting new joint programmes and micro-credentials within their alliance. Challenges included complex administrative processes, conflicting national rules, and a lack of implementation of the European approach for joint programmes. Lessons learned emphasised the importance of flexibility and trust in collaborative practices.

YUFE has developed an approach to quality assurance that is flexible and built on trust. Their internal quality assurance system ensures that existing courses that have undergone external quality assurance are not re-evaluated, and they do not differentiate between academic and non-academic activities.

The **Belgian (FL)** representative stated that governments play a role in creating an enabling environment for higher education institutions and agencies to work together. Governments should support a quality culture within alliances and engage all stakeholders, including students. The Erasmus+-funded **EUniQ** project aimed to adapt the European approach for joint programmes to the alliance level, focusing on enhancing quality rather than just accountability.

With regard to linking quality assurance and automatic recognition, participants agreed that there is a need to make existing tools, such as ECTS and the European approach to joint programmes more widespread and accepted. In that regard, **EQAR** is working on digitalisation and engagement with Ministries to promote these tools, and has seen more use of the European approach.

PARTICIPANTS

MODERATOR

Vanessa Debiais-Sainton, Head of the Higher Education Unit. European Commission

She is Head of the Unit in charge of European higher Education policies and programme at the European Commission's Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. The unit is the lead service for the development and implementation of the European Education Area's higher education dimension, including the European Strategy for Universities presented in January 2022. This includes the development and implementation of flagship initiatives such as: 'European Universities' alliances, a joint European degree, the European student card initiative, a European Approach to Micro-credentials, the automatic recognition of higher education qualifications, tracking graduates and the higher education strand of Erasmus+.

In previous posts in the European Commission, Vanessa has worked in DG Research and Innovation.

Before moving to the European Commission in 2006, Vanessa spent eight years working for several chemical companies.



PARTICIPANTS

PANELISTS

Stephane Lauwick, President. EQAR Alliance

He is EQAR's second elected president. His three-year mandate started on 1 July 2023.

Stéphane is no stranger to higher education and quality assurance, with extensive experience not only in the French HE sector, at the University Institute of Technology in Le Havre, but also at the European level, as former President of EURASHE.

He started his university career at the University of Le Havre Normandy (FR) where he was head of the Electrical Engineering department. He was then elected International Vice-President of the French network of University Institutes of Technology. In this capacity, he promoted the French Institutes of Technology, mainly outside Europe. Earlier in his career he was the Director of the Life Long Learning Centre and Apprenticeship Training Centre at University Of Le Havre Normandy (2007-2011) and also a reviewer at the HCERES (then AERES), the French Higher Education Quality Assurance agency.

As the president of EQAR, Stéphane has indicated that one of his priorities would be to advance on the road to true automatic recognition by facilitating the cross-border operation of EQAR registered agencies and the application of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.



PARTICIPANTS

Aleksandar Šušnjar. Institutional Coordinators.
YUFE Alliance

He is the Institutional Coordinator for *Young Universities for the Future of Europe* (YUFE) Alliance at the University of Rijeka. His main areas of work include the European degree label initiative (FOCI project), development of YUFE educational offer (including joint programmes) and coordinating participation of University of Rijeka experts in all YUFE activities. More broadly, Aleksandar has participated in or is currently engaged in European projects on inter-institutional cooperation, transnational educational programmes, quality of higher education, and social dimension. He has also been a member of different national and European policy-making and expert groups dealing with student engagement, social dimension, qualification frameworks, and quality assurance and enhancement.

With expert background in quality assurance, Aleksandar has coordinated internal quality evaluations at the University of Rijeka and participated in over 20 institutional, QA agency, and developmental thematic reviews at the national and international level. Since 2021, he is a member of the Register Committee of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).



PARTICIPANTS

Emily Palmer, Secretary-General. Una Europa Alliance

Emily Palmer joined Una Europa vzw as Secretary-General in April 2019. Una Europa is an alliance of eleven leading European research-intensive universities that have come together to create a truly European inter-university environment, a University of the Future.

Emily is entrusted with the daily management of the Una Europa Association and its office and staff.

Before joining Una Europa, Emily worked for the EuroTech Universities Alliance for seven years, with the final five years as Head of Brussels Office.

The previous decade was spent working in UK regional offices in Brussels, advising the universities on EU policy and funding.

Emily graduated with a Master of Arts in European Studies at the University of Sussex in 2003.



PARTICIPANTS

Liesbeth Hens. Policy advisor on higher education. Ministry of education and training. Flemish Community.

Liesbeth Hens joined the Ministry of Education and Training in 2007, and has a passion for education policy and, more specifically, for higher education policies and strategies. During her career, she held various positions in this sector, in higher education institutions and at policy level.

She has a special interest in higher education funding and governance issues.

