



Quality Assurance Fit for the Changing World of Higher Education

Douglas Blackstock
Former President, ENQA
Former CEO, QAA UK
ASHE, Zagreb, Croatia 25 November 2025

FROM A DISCUSSION IN LIFE BEFORE COVID... CHANGES AFFECTING QUALITY 2030

- Micro-credentials
- Credit accumulation & transfer
- Flexible qualifications
- Student mobility
- E-assessment

Caveat from the passage of time

Some of these issues have been discussed since the 1980s

New issues have emerged

Artificial Intelligence

European University Alliances

WHAT IS QUALITY, NOW AND IN THE FUTURE?

- **learning approach** – student centred, stretching, new concepts
- **learning environment** – teaching or study spaces, library, IT support
- **engagement** – desire to learn, inspiration from teachers & support staff
- **assessment** – recognising learning in a fair and transparent way
- **experience** – during application, admission, induction, time on campus, the social and well being aspects, growing as an individual
- **relevant** – programmes for life, work and society
- **inclusive**– being able to contribute to the academic community
- Any measurement of quality will always be a proxy - holistic view needed

QUALITY IS NOT GENERATED BY ACCIDENT

Quality takes:

- Time
 - Design
 - Reflection
 - Co-creation
-
- And is best advanced when institutions, students, and stakeholders collaborate in developing expectations and sharing of effective practice
 - European Standards and Guidelines have two pillars - assurance and enhancement.
 - Assurance is necessary for trust and enhancement makes us better!

After 27 years of the Bologna Process, more trust should be placed in higher education institutions.

Process vs outcomes debates – can you achieve good outcomes without good process?

Hot topics for QA

Diversification of types of HE provision

Digitalisation and Artificial intelligence in learning, teaching and assessment – supporting students and staff readiness – implications for QA

Transparency of QA of transnational education – ROQA-TNE project

Academic fraud– essay mills, diploma mills, accreditation mills

Cross Border choice of QA agency – updating of key considerations of CBQA

EU Policy initiatives – European Degrees, Union of Skills, University Alliances

Oh, and the **revision of the European Standards and Guidelines**

DIVERSITY IN HE PROVISION

'European degree' and a label for joint degrees, micro-credentials, degree apprenticeships, online universities, private and corporate providers, transnational education

All create new and exciting options for access to higher education for students... QA can be an enabler whilst protecting students

Will there be equality of access for students in all options?

HIGHER EDUCATION IS CHANGING, RAPIDLY

Digitalisation, data and AI are transforming internal quality assurance and performance management of HEIs....

External QA cannot prevent this (nor should it) but how do we respond to it?

AI systems like ChatGPT are increasingly used in higher education for writing, tutoring, grading, and advising

Capabilities now include advanced reasoning, multilingual feedback, and simulated conversation

But: Are these systems just tools, or are they reshaping how we learn, teach, and assure quality?

E.g. University of Law 3 strands for AI – internal efficiency, improve support for students, support for professions

HOW ARE QA AGENCIES ADAPTING FOR DIGITAL & AI? RANGES THROUGH SUPPORT FOR HEIS OR USE IN THEIR OWN PROCESSES (OR NOT)

QAA UK, dedicated web resources to support HEIs and share practice

ANQA, Armenia, using ChatGPT to analyse external review reports

HKCAAVQ, Hong Kong, using automation and AI tools to get 30% reduction in administration tasks in accreditation

NOKUT, Norway – digitalisation committee – processes smoother for HEIs, analyse submissions – understand how HEIs are using AI?

ARACIS, Romania – mapped practice in 26 countries – shows improving efficiency of QA processes.



‘People have a very high trust in ChatGPT, which is interesting, because AI hallucinates. It should be the tech that you don’t trust that much.’

Sam Altman, CEO, Open AI

How well equipped is external QA in keeping pace with these changes?

Challenges for agencies

Most agencies have resource constraints, many have a small staff base

Around 1/3 of agencies get little or no government funding and are in price sensitive situations

Developing the technical knowledge for the next period

Have to avoid external QA inhibiting innovation

How can ENQA can support support

Sharing practice from agencies and innovative HEIs

Draft ENQA statement on AI

Updating ENQA staff competencies framework



European Standards & Guidelines 2015



A key goal of the ...(ESG)... is to contribute to the **common understanding of quality assurance for learning and teaching**



The ESG are not standards for quality, **nor do they prescribe how the quality assurance processes are implemented...**



The EHEA is characterised by its diversity of political systems, higher education systems, socio-cultural and educational traditions, languages, aspirations and expectations. This makes **a single monolithic approach to quality and quality assurance in higher education inappropriate.**

European Standards & Guidelines 2027



Public consultation on full draft was launched on 17 November



All proposals still under discussion.



Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed!

Starting point based on extensive consultations through QA-FIT project:

- Don't fix what isn't broken –
- Bring up to date
- Alignment with other Bologna policies
- Applicability in diverse contexts
- Address areas of unclarity based on application experience

Key issues for QA agencies:

- Flexibility to address changes
- Room for innovation in EQA
- Maintain peer review, independence of agencies, transparency, central role of students

QUALITY ASSURANCE ALIGNED TO THE ESG IS ESSENTIAL FOR TRUST IN QUALIFICATIONS

ENQA has 62 full members from 33 countries which is likely to grow as more agencies align with European Standards and Guidelines

14 EHEA countries do not yet have agencies aligned with the ESG – some never will be as system is too small for an agency

The ENQA led SEQA-ESG programme, supported by EQAR, has worked with 11 affiliate agencies to support them align with the ESG

Ministers need to live up to their commitments and remove barriers for agencies

Example: University of Law is creating an AI enabled ecosystem

Aims:

1. A University model fit for the AI age
2. Smarter learning for students
3. More time for staff to reinvest in students

Components:

1. AI strategy
2. Digital education strategy
3. Tech Research Academy
4. Centre for Learning Teaching and Assessment
5. AI competence centre

A whole institution approach with AI supporting

1. Curriculum & Pedagogy
2. Research & Innovation in LTA
3. Events & Engagement for students and industry
4. External collaborations
5. Systems & Processes
6. Operations & Infrastructure

Number of new UK entry-level jobs has dived since ChatGPT launch - research

Vacancies for graduate jobs, apprenticeships, internships and junior jobs with no degree requirement have dropped 32%, Adzuna finds



Douglas Blackstock

Thank You

Follow ENQA at www.enqa.eu

Follow QAA at www.qaa.ac.uk

Follow me at [Douglas Blackstock | LinkedIn](#)

Get in touch via
douglasblackstock@hotmail.com