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European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF) as an example of EUA's activity

The improvement of higher education quality is one of the main aims which Europe is trying to reach. Various policies such as students and teachers mobility encouraging, European degree structures revising, transparency and comparability of qualifications promoting are being developed nowadays. In spite of all that, true higher education quality changing cannot result only from the formal quality assurance processes, it is a combined work of all members of the European higher education community.

European University Association together with other educational organizations implements various projects and programmes, organizes meetings concerning above mentioned subject. One of the events noteworthy in this context is the European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF). Since the year 2006 together with the associate organizations ENQA, ESU and EURASHE European University Association arranges the event in different countries. The main purpose of EQAF is to provide a unique platform for the higher education and quality assurance communities to monitor, shape and anticipate developments in the field of education, thus creating a common European understanding of QA.

It is necessary to remind that idea of the European Forum for Quality Assurance was proposed in 2003 by EUA to the E4 Group, which includes ENQA, ESIB, EUA, and EURASHE. This group has been meeting regularly since 12 September 2001 to discuss the ways of developing a European dimension for quality assurance. All aspects of the first EQAF were organized by the staff of the Technical University of Munich (23–25 November, 2006), it was devoted to the topic of

embedding quality culture in higher education. The second Forum, hosted by the Sapienza Università di Roma, was focused upon “Implementing and Using Quality Assurance: Strategy and Practice” and attracted over 500 participants: academics, QA agencies and students. The keynote was to see the quality from a conceptual, historical and policy perspective. The discussions were mostly concentrated on institutional case studies and showed the variety of ways that higher education institutions and QA agencies ensured quality. The third EQAF took place on the 20–22nd of November, 2008 in Budapest and had the thematic focus “Trends in quality assurance”. The fourth one – Copenhagen, Denmark (19–21 November 2009) was devoted to the topic of “Creativity and Diversity: Challenges for quality assurance beyond 2010”. The fifth EQAF was held at the Claude Bernard Lyon I University in France and had the theme “Building Bridges: making sense of QA in European, national and institutional contexts”. The relationship and interaction between European and national policy decisions and the institutional and agency-level realities were discussed. The 2011 Forum (hosted by the University of Antwerp and Artesis University College Antwerp, Belgium 17–19 November) aimed to explore the purposes of both internal and external QA. The main purpose was to foster a dialogue on quality assurance that bridges national boundaries and leads to a truly European discussion on QA in higher education, and to create a common European understanding of QA through a dialogue among different stakeholder groups. The 7th European Quality Assurance Forum, co-organised by ENQA, ESU, EUA and EURASHE took place at Tallinn University, Tallinn, Estonia, on the 22–24 of November, 2012. That year event explored the impact of external and internal QA on higher education policies and institutional realities. Such issues as external evaluation and institutional follow-up, the relationship between QA, pedagogical approaches and student learning, QA supporting institutional aims and profiles, QA supporting informed decision-making (of students, departments, institutions, policy makers) and the role of QA in globalised higher education were at issue. The 8th European Quality Assurance Forum “Working together to take quality forward”, hosted by the University of Gothenburg, Sweden 21–23 November 2013, specifically explored how

both individuals and organizations can better understand the role that quality assurance can play in their daily lives, get engaged and work together to take quality forward. The 9th European Quality Assurance Forum entitled “Changing education – QA and the shift from teaching to learning” took place at the University of Barcelona, Spain, on 13–15 November 2014. The Forum examined how current QA approaches were keeping up with and supporting developments in learning and teaching. In its turn the 10th European Quality Assurance Forum “Taking stock and looking forward” took place on 19–21 November 2015 and was hosted by the Quality Assurance Agency / UCL Institute of Education, London, United Kingdom. The aim of the Forum was to understand QA in the EHEA from a variety of perspectives and explore the ways in which concrete practices in institutions and agencies reflect European level policies. This year 11th European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF) took place in Ljubljana, Slovenia and was hosted by the Slovenian Student Union and the University of Ljubljana. The forum gathered more than 400 participants to discuss current issues in quality assurance devoted to the theme “Quality in context – embedding improvement”. Such issues as transferability of principles and methods, flexibility for experimentation in approaches, and the importance of trust in engaging stakeholders in quality assurance activities were under debate. The attention was also turned to the impact of national characteristics on quality assurance frameworks. The Forum also touches the questions of modern classroom and how approaches to quality assurance must keep up with ongoing changes in the learning environment. The next 12th one will be hosted by the University of Latvia in Riga Forum from 23 to 25 November 2017.

So, the European Quality Assurance Forum has become one of the premier event for quality assurance in Europe with more than 400 participants from across Europe and beyond every year. EQAF provides the participants with an opportunity for professional development and updating their knowledge.

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