

E-TRAIN: European Training of QA Experts

1. Summary of the project

The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) insist that “the experts undertaking the external quality assurance activity have appropriate skills”. The ESG point out that quality assurance agencies (QAAs) should provide “appropriate briefing and training for experts” and insist on “the use of international experts”.

The European University Association indicated in its Trends V Report that “the expert pool in any single country that could be used to evaluate the quality of programmes is extremely limited, and this is clearly an issue where regional cooperation would seem to offer a solution”.

This project intends to strengthen the European dimension in quality assurance by making it possible for QAAs to identify trained and experienced experts from other European countries. In turn this contributes to two of the objectives of LLP- Erasmus, namely to “promote co-operation in quality assurance in all sectors of education and training in Europe” and to “support the achievement of a European Higher Education Area”.

The first action line of the project is to enhance the quality of Training Programmes for experts. This will be done in three successive steps. Firstly good practices in training of experts within and outside of Higher Education will be identified. Based on this QAA staff will be provided with training on a European level on how to train experts. Finally the trained QAA staff will conduct pilot training sessions for experts. Outcomes of this action line will be a Handbook for trainers and a Handbook for training experts.

The second action line of the project is to develop a system to share trained and experienced experts on the European level. To do this national expert databases will be set up. These databases will be approachable to the other QAAs through a database on a European level. After the project the expert database will also be made available to QAAs in the EHEA.

2. Why does the consortium wish to undertake this project?

The ESG insist that “the experts undertaking the external quality assurance activity have appropriate skills”. It points out that quality assurance agencies should provide “appropriate briefing and training for experts” and insists on “the use of international experts”. The European University Association indicated in its Trends V Report that institutions attach an

increasing importance to internationalisation and that this “has resulted in some cases in the deliberate use of international experts in the quality assurance process.” (p. 57). Additionally: “A further issue is that the expert pool in any single country that could be used to evaluate the quality of programmes is extremely limited, and this is clearly an issue where regional cooperation would seem to offer a solution.” (p.71)

Already in 2004, the Methodological Report of ENQA’s TEEP II Project, in which Erasmus Mundus programmes were evaluated, pointed out that “finding subject-area experts in specialised internationally-oriented interdisciplinary areas may in the future be more problematic. In several such [areas] there may be a limited availability of experts, and the question of conflict of interest is therefore a delicate one.” The Methodological Report advises generic but concrete training for experts.

Since then, the Bologna Process and other European developments have brought about more joint programmes and similar types of cross-border higher education provision. This type of higher education requires quality assurance procedures that are fit for purpose. Regarding the panel, the fitness for purpose can be attained by being able to find the right experts and by providing them the necessary training. The training programme is intended to empower peers enabling them to take part in assessment processes without being overwhelmed by the procedures themselves. Better trained experts with increased international QA knowledge and experience will facilitate the reviews of joint programmes and increase the European dimension in national QA procedures.

3. Aims and objectives

The overall aim of E-TRAIN is to facilitate the sharing of trained, knowledgeable, and internationally experienced experts who will be better equipped to participate in QA procedures, to the benefit of higher education institution institutions under review.

The first objective of the project is to develop a European training programme for experts in quality assurance procedures. This programme will provide in training for staff members of quality assurance agencies and for training of experts (peers) who will be part of assessment panels. Good practices for training of experts will be identified, QAA staff will be trained and pilot training sessions for experts will be conducted. The scheduled training sessions provide an opportunity for the consortium and stakeholders to have a hands- on approach to the training of both QAA staff and experts. The training programme will consist of an easily accessible Knowledge Base on external quality assurance procedures, online training modules on quality, quality assurance and assessment methodologies and (national) support by experts of the responsible quality assurance agency.

The second objective of the project is to develop a programme to share experts among quality assurance agencies in Europe. This programme will develop a template portfolio for panel members and a database providing easy access to quality assurance agencies to these portfolios.

These objectives will be achieved on the one hand by the methodologies proposed and on the other hand by the strong involvement of representatives from within and outside of Higher Education.

4. Impact and Sustainability:

Short term target-groups: Describe the target group(s) that will be reached during the life of the project

A first short-term target group are the experts who are part of assessment panels in national external quality assurance procedures. They can participate in the test version of the training programme.

A second target group are the higher education institutions undergoing external quality assurance procedures. They can give feedback to the training of experts.

A third target group are the quality assurance and accreditation agencies in Europe. They will be able to participate in the training programme of experts and staff members, and in the sharing programme of experts.

How will this group / these groups be reached and involved during the lifetime of the project?

Experts Training programme

- Experts part of assessment panels in external quality assurance procedures
 - o Experts will be asked to give feedback on the designed training
 - o Experts will be trained with the test version of the training programme
- Higher education institutions undergoing external quality assurance procedures
 - o Institutions will be asked to provide feedback on the performance of panels that were trained through the test version of the training
- Quality assurance and accreditation agencies in Europe
 - o Quality assurance and accreditation agencies will be asked to give feedback on the designed training
 - o Staff members of Quality assurance and accreditation agencies will receive training to coach panel members during their training

Experts Sharing programme

- Experts part of assessment panels in external quality assurance procedures
 - o Experts will be asked to give feedback on the draft portfolio
 - o Experts will be asked to fill in the draft portfolio
- Quality assurance and accreditation agencies in Europe
 - o Quality assurance and accreditation agencies will be asked to give feedback on the draft portfolio
 - o Quality assurance and accreditation agencies will be asked to fill portfolios and include them in the database

Long term target groups: Describe the target group(s) that will be reached after the project is finished

The long term target groups are the QA agencies and the higher education institutions who will both benefit from well trained, internationally experienced in QA procedures. The experts will benefit too from the fact that there is a well tested European training programme available that will enable them to professionalise their skills as an expert in QA procedures.

How will this group be reached

The strong involvement in the project of stakeholders from within and outside of HE will be sustained after the project. The training programme and the project results will be regularly updated by the ECA partners. Stakeholders will be involved in these updates. Feedback from experts, agencies and institutions will be sought, starting a year after the end of the project and then to be repeated annually. The available infrastructure of ECA and the member agencies carrying out the training programme will ensure that target groups, also on a national scale, will be reached and that the programme is constantly open for new experts to join.

How will the impact be sustained

ECA is an affiliate member of ENQA and has signed a cooperation agreement with the Network of Central and Eastern European Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEEN). ECA has also signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). The cooperation with ENQA (of which ECA is affiliate member and ECA members are also full members of ENQA) will be particularly important for dissemination throughout the EHEA. Through these networks and in their cooperation with partners in this project, the results of E-TRAIN will be disseminated to all other European QAAs who will get to know this project and be able to share in its results. As the project results are in the public domain there are no barriers from profiting of the results. ECA will take responsibility for the continuation of the project results.