PATRICK VAN DEN BOSCH
ENQA VICE-PRESIDENT
HAQAA3
ONLINE, 17 NOVEMBER 2026

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION: APPROACHES AND DIMENSIONS IN EUROPE

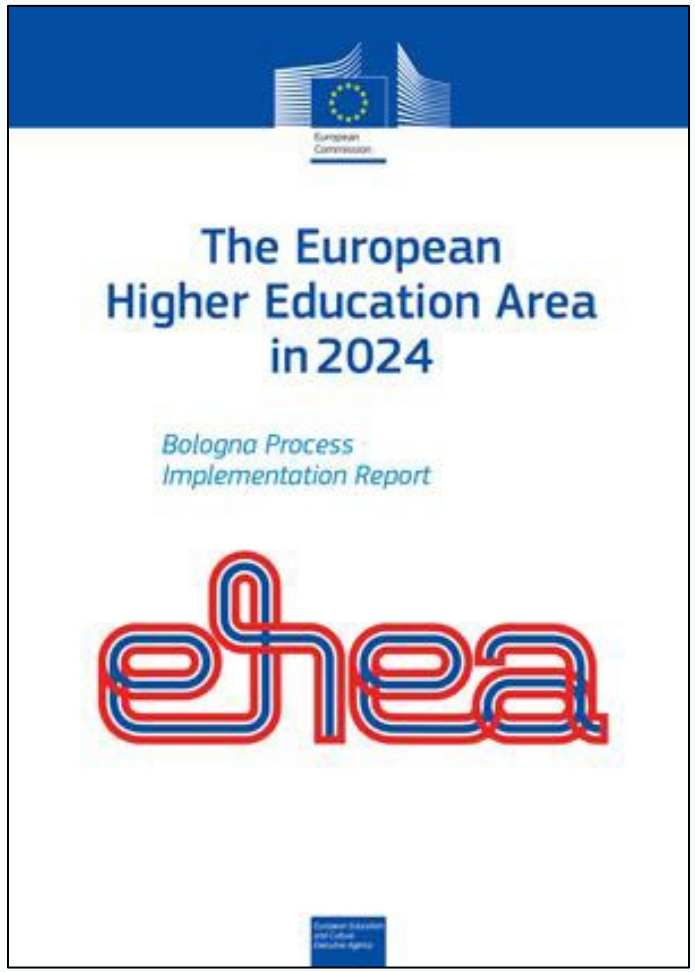
THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA (EHEA)

- The 1999 Bologna Declaration launched an intergovernmental European process.
- Between 1999 and 2010, the Bologna Process laid the foundations for the EHEA, making higher education systems more comparable, compatible and coherent.
- The EHEA was formally launched in 2010 as a framework for cooperation between public authorities and higher education stakeholders, based on mutual trust and shared objectives.
- The EHEA comprises 49 member countries and the European Commission; the representation rights of Russia and Belarus have been suspended since 2022 + consultative members (including ENQA).



https://www.enqa.eu/publications/enqa-briefing-note-on-the-bologna-process/
https://ehea.info/page-full_members

THE BOLOGNA PROCESS



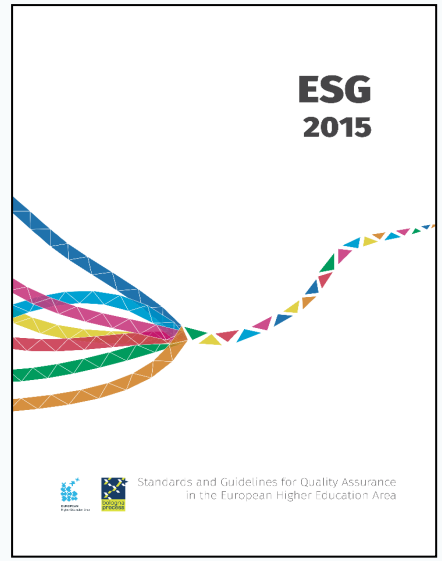
Three key commitments:

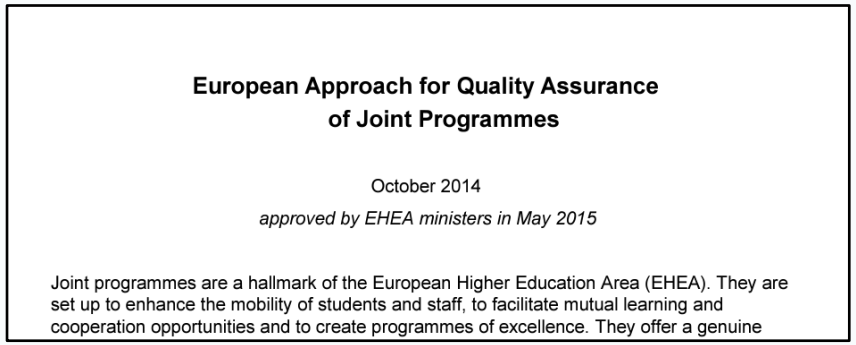
- A three-cycle degree structure: bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees
- Fair recognition of qualifications and study periods abroad
- Quality assurance to enhance the quality and relevance of teaching and learning

https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/publications/european-higher-education-area-2024-bologna-process-implementation-report
https://ehea.info/

EHEA TOOLS FOR EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

- Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)
- External quality assurance at programme and institutional level
- External reviews of quality assurance agencies
- European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)
- European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes
- Cross-border recognition of decisions by EQAR-registered agencies




European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes

October 2014

approved by EHEA ministers in May 2015

Joint programmes are a hallmark of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). They are set up to enhance the mobility of students and staff, to facilitate mutual learning and cooperation opportunities and to create programmes of excellence. They offer a genuine

ENQA IN BRIEF



Who we are

Membership association of QA agencies:

62 members

43 affiliates



What we do

Represent interests of members

Provide services to members and stakeholders

Drive development of external QA



How we do it

Policy input

Events

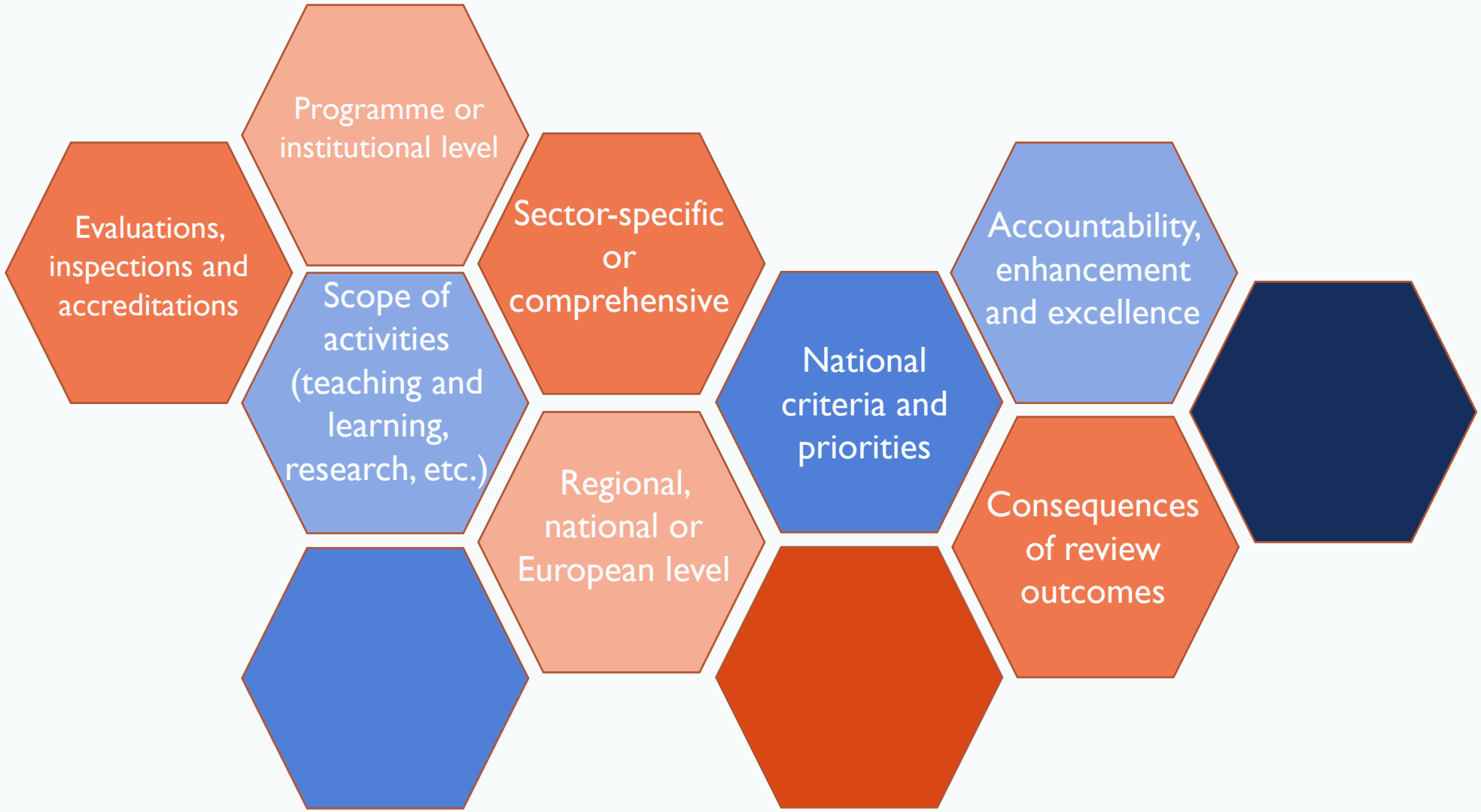
Working groups

Projects

Publications

Agency reviews

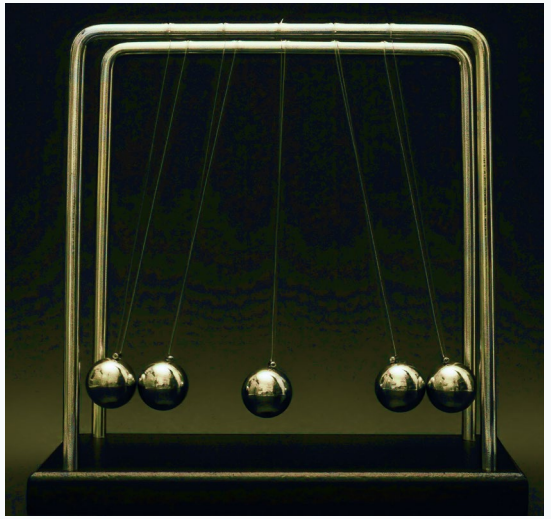
DIVERSITY OF EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EHEA



INSTITUTIONAL AND PROGRAMME-LEVEL EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

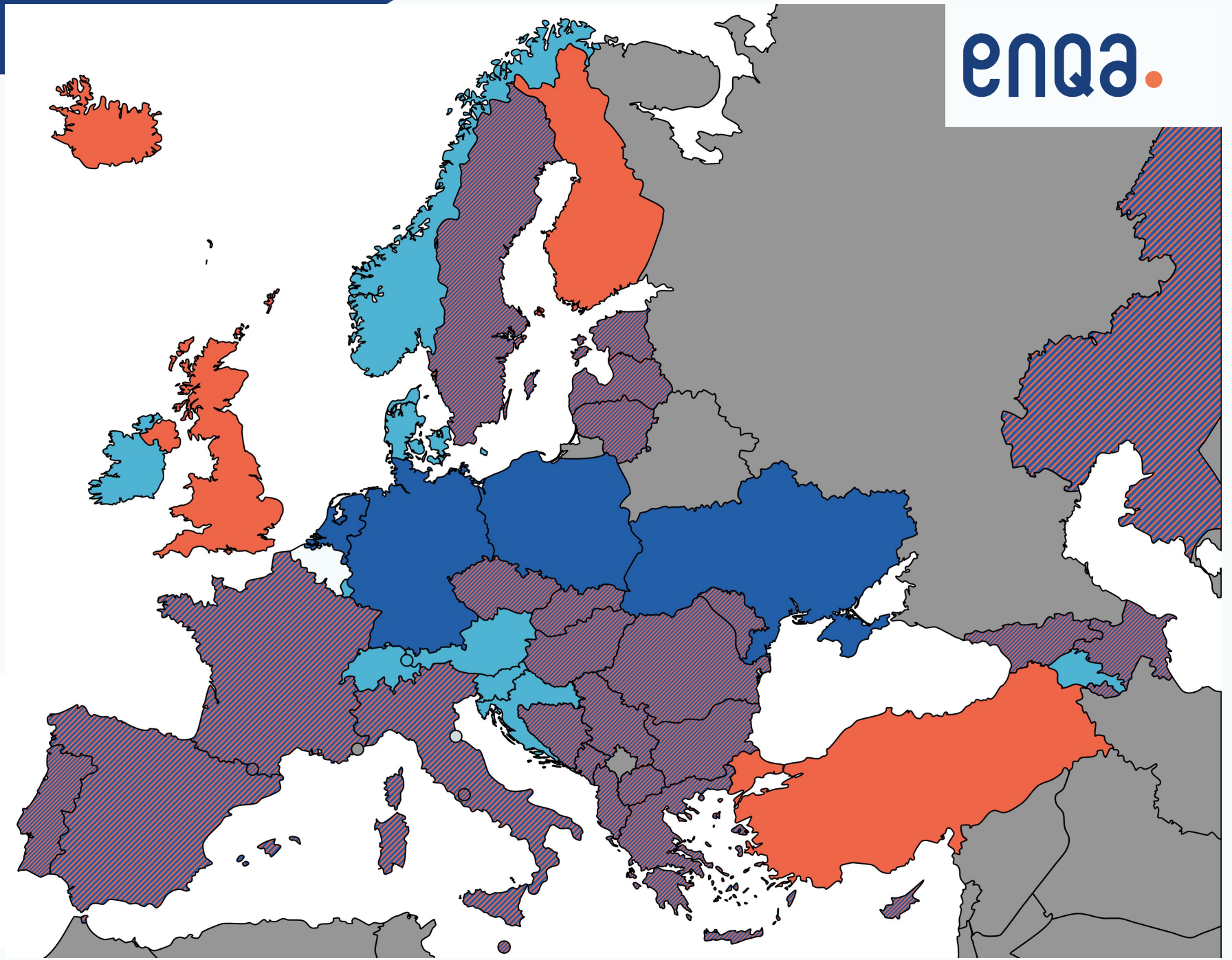
- **Institutional external** quality assurance has gained prominence over the past 10–15 years:
  - Institutional autonomy
  - Review fatigue at programme level
  - Development of an institutional quality culture

- Alternative approaches to **programme-level** external quality assurance



CURRENT SITUATION IN THE EHEA

Most EHEA countries have adopted mixed models combining institutional and programme-level external quality assurance



INSTITUTIONAL AND PROGRAMME-LEVEL EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

- 'Pure' models are relatively uncommon in the EHEA: most countries use **mixed approaches**
- Institutional accreditation or review can **increase institutional autonomy** in quality assurance, while also strengthening **institutional accountability**
- Choosing a model requires **dialogue among stakeholders**, taking into account:
  - The maturity of the system and development of a quality culture
  - The diversity and degree of centralisation of the system
  - The role of the quality assurance agency

DIVERSITY OF EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EHEA: BELGIUM

- Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles (French-speaking Community of Belgium)
  - AEQES – Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

- Flanders
  - NVAO – Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders
  - VLUHR QA – Quality Assurance Agency of the Flemish Higher Education Council
  - Other EQAR-registered agencies

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Thank you

Thanks to my colleagues on the ENQA Board and in the Secretariat for their support in preparing this presentation: Doris Herrmann, Alexis Fábregas Almiral and Luis Miranda