

Quality Assurance in Prior Learning - Methods change but standards of quality endure

**Recognition of Prior Learning
Bologna seminar,
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ENQA**

Background information on ENQA

- “ founded as a network in 2000; changed into association in 2004; based in Helsinki
- “ umbrella NGO for European QA agencies
- “ 37 Full members, 9 Candidate members
- “ associates and affiliates since 2006: 22+2
- “ organisational structure: Board, General Assembly, Secretariat
- “ ongoing project: external reviews of ENQA member agencies by 2010
- “ co-operation within E4 (EUA, ESU, EURASHE)
- “ consultative member in the Bologna Follow-up Group

European standards and guidelines (ESG)

- “ Drafted by ENQA in consultation with EUA, EURASHE and ESU
- “ Approved by the Bologna ministerial conference in Bergen in 2005
- “ Introduced **internationally accepted standards** for quality assurance in higher education
 - ESG for internal QA within HEIs
 - ESG for the external QA of higher education
 - ESG for external QA agencies
- “ Introduced a **peer review system for quality assurance agencies**:
 - ▶ Cyclical reviews of agencies, based on ESG, every five years for (reconfirmation of) full ENQA membership and/or for being (re)listed in EQAR

European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education



- “ After the ministerial endorsement, a Register working group was set up by E4
- “ EQAR was founded as an association under Belgian Law on 4 March 2008
- “ A web-based information tool (www.eqar.eu), list of QA agencies operating in Europe, containing basic information
 - will not organise events, publish reports, share good practice or conduct (research) projects as ENQA does
- “ First applications received in September 2008
 - ▶ first 3 agencies entered the register in November, all of which were ENQA Full members

Bologna Process: priorities for 2009 and beyond

- “ **Mobility; social dimension; data collection; employability; EHEA in a global context**
→ **All relevant for recognition of prior learning (PL)**

- “ **Life-long learning (LLL) and the recognition of prior learning**
→ BFUG will report to the ministerial meeting in 2009 on the possible further developments and support structures

- “ **Possible re-balancing of EHEA priorities?**
→ **Stress the recognition of PL?**

Trends in the European quality procedures

The five highest impacting items

- programme level procedures:

qualifications of staff; curriculum/syllabus; facilities and resources; internal QA procedures; mission/goals.

- institutional level procedures:

internal QA procedures; management, organisation; mission/goals; qualifications of staff; facilities and resources.

➤ **HE shift from a teaching to a learning focus. Addressing learning outcomes in (external) QA is only at the beginning.**

➤ **To be followed by addressing assessment of PL outcomes?**

Methods change but standards of quality endure (*WICHE, 2001*)

Recognition of prior learning takes place through an **individual competency assessment**. The purpose of this is to recognise all your knowledge, skills and qualifications no matter how they were achieved. For instance you might have achieved them through prior education, employment, stays abroad, participation in courses or other educational activities, such as youth and adult education, voluntary work and the like. (www.ciriusonline.dk)

- *RPL supporting individual ways of learning*
- *RPL supporting diverse ways of learning*
- *RPL supporting accreditation of learning outcomes?*
- *RPL supporting quality?*

Challenges in QA

- “ Rankings as quality criteria (increased demand for “market information”)
- “ Assessment of learning outcomes
- “ Transnational learning
- “ New providers in education
- “ e-Learning
- “ Lifelong learning (LLL)
- “ Prior learning (PL)

(Middelhurst, Robin: Quality Assurance Implications of New Higher Education)

New curricula and challenges in QA

- “ A new requirement for education programmes is to be flexibly organised (revised curricula) meeting the needs and potential of individual students.

 - “ Revised curricula recognising prior learning bring new challenges to QA in terms of credit arrangements:
 - ▶ **Competence-based education**
 - ▶ **Work-based learning (fully or partly accredited)**
 - ▶ **Experiential learning**
- (Middlehurst, Robin: Quality Assurance Implications of New Forms of Higher Education)*

Key features for QA of RPL

1. Policies and procedures
 2. Information, guidance and counseling/support services
 3. Roles and responsibilities of institutions
 4. Monitoring and review of RPL policies and practices
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Policies and procedures

- **Recognition is a matter of academic judgement as in other assessment procedures** (QAA, UK: *Guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning*)

- PL assessment procedures should be:
 - “ undertaken by academic/ teaching staff with expertise in the subject or skills area, and in RPL policies and procedures
 - “ explicitly subject to quality assurance processes
 - “ regularly monitored, reviewed and revised in the same way as other assessment procedures
 - “ comparable to other assessment procedures
 - “ evidence based, transparent and accountable

Information, guidance and counseling/support services

- HEIs should have a **plan for counseling and guidance**;
- They should promote their RPL policies, procedures and practices by **providing clear, accurate and easily accessible information** for applicants, academic staff, examiners and stakeholders about:
 - “ the terminology, scope and boundaries used in the RPL policies, procedures and practices;
 - “ the assessment procedures and the criteria, learning/ competency outcomes used when assessing a RPL application;
 - “ the subjects, modules, competencies, courses and qualifications for which RPL can be used in order for the applicants to prepare their evidence to the standard required for the RPL assessment process.

Information, guidance and counseling/support services (2)

- Information should be provided to applicants about:
 - “ the RPL application and assessment processes that may be used
 - “ contact persons
 - “ support services for the preparation of the application
 - “ timelines
 - “ appeals procedures
 - “ fees
 - “ the evidence to be presented
- Appropriate support should be available to applicants:
 - “ as regards the submission of RPL applications and the feedback on decisions
 - “ to ensure they choose the appropriate programme of study as a consequence of their RPL process
- RPL should be available at any time in the student's enrolment in a qualification.

Roles and responsibilities of institutions

- **Firm foundations for QA are laid in HEIs**
- “ Working with competence assessments makes **new demands** on the guidance provided by the educational institutions, on their teaching staff’s competences (pedagogical development) and on their organisational structure.
- “ Appropriate arrangements should be developed for the training and support of all staff associated with the support, guidance and assessment of claims for the accreditation of PL.

(QAA, UK: Guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning)

Roles and responsibilities of institutions (2)

- Develop and maintain quality assured procedures promoting RPL to learners (see Information, guidance and counseling/support services)
- Designate responsibilities and accountabilities for undertaking RPL assessments
- Statement of the qualifications and skills RPL assessors should have
- Statement of how RPL policies, processes and assessments are quality assured
- Explicitly include RPL policies, procedures, processes and assessment outcomes in their quality assurance mechanisms
- Quality assurance mechanisms have to be clear and transparent in order to ensure stakeholders' confidence in RPL decisions
- Develop knowledge and negotiate with providers about credit transfer/articulation and PL

Monitoring and review of RPL policies and practices

- RPL decisions should be accountable, transparent, demonstrably rigorous and fair, and subject to appeal and review
 - Procedures for monitoring and review should be clearly established (e.g. explicitly included in institutional quality assurance systems) to guarantee that qualifications achieved through RPL have the same quality and reputation as qualifications achieved through formal education/training
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- **QA begins at HEIs in dialogue with management, staff and students**

 - **Mutual tools to support the recognition of PL**
 - “ EQF
 - “ Europass
 - “ European credit systems
 - “ A Portfolio Model
 - “ e-Portfolio as a standardised model?

 - **Mutual principles to support the quality assurance of PL**

 - **The development of QA in PL requires a continuous dialogue between HEIs, employers, policymakers and quality assurance agencies**
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What actions ENQA could take to help better evaluate PL?

- “ Collect data on the international ‘state of art’ in PL
- “ Share experience and best practice in workshops and seminars involving all stakeholders
- “ Train review experts to face and assess different individual, institutional, national, European and international phenomena in the new ways of learning
- “ Engage new stakeholders (as employers and civil sector/ other new providers of education) in the QA processes
- “ Implement European guidelines regarding the recognition, accreditation and quality assurance of PL

ENQA / European QA in the future

- “ ENQA as European quality assurance agency? Or a think-thank?
 - “ The future of the ESG? Introducing PL quality standards at an European level?
 - “ Radical rethinking of quality assurance?
 - “ New stakeholders as quality experts?
 - “ New assessment of learning outcomes?
 - “ Recognising and stressing the diversity of learning?
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Developing external QA in a changing world:

Student-centred learning, learning outcomes, stakeholder involvement, accountability to society, evaluation of transnational learning, prior learning, lifelong learning and e-learning.

- **Demands on QA get diverse**
 - **Purpose of QA gets diverse**
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**Thank you
for your attention!**

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