



THE AFRICA-EU PARTNERSHIP  
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## Conclusions & Recommendations

"QUALITY ASSURANCE  
AND RELEVANCE OF  
STUDY PROGRAMMES"

### Introduction – why are these issues relevant?

Harmonised quality higher education systems are imperative for Africa to realise the potential of higher education and research. This is a core feature of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA), which is safeguarded by the African Union. Harmonised systems not only facilitate a common language on quality standards but allow for trust building and the recognition of degrees and qualifications – a precondition for the mobility of trained individuals across the continent. Relevant study programmes are a core feature of this agenda: they cater to the increased focus on employability and to the societal impact of higher education.

### Summary of discussion

Framed around African Union continental objectives for higher education harmonisation, as well as the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership, the session was an occasion to outline the 'Pan-Africa Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework (PAQAF)' and its various instruments which are currently developed or under development. One of these instruments are the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA), which delineate minimum standards for higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies with regards to how they evaluate and ensure quality – an instrument which provides a common language for quality standards.

The Harmonisation for African Quality Assurance and Accreditation (HAQAA) Initiative (by which the ASG-QA were developed) have received continuous support by the EU just as the Tuning Initiative which provides support for the alignment of study programmes across borders in diverse disciplines and has also generated a proposal for a common African credit transfer system. The discussion closed with a perspective on quality assurance development in the context of the European Higher Education Area, and shared observations and lessons on this process for Africa.

### Recommendations

1. **Streamline and further promote the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework (PAQAF) and its instruments continent-wide.**

Important work is being done in the context of the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership (the HAQAA Initiative, the Tuning Initiative and the support given for the development of the African Qualifications Framework) to develop the promised instruments of the PAQAF and also promote them on different levels across the African continent. It should be stressed that:

- PAQAF is based on a number of complementary instruments (Addis Convention, ASG-QA, the African Quality Rating Mechanism, the African Credit Transfer System and the African Qualifications Framework). Their interaction is critical in reaching harmonisation objectives in the HE sector.
- PAQAF should consider regional developments, as the five different African regions and their respective education actors are developing at different speeds, sometimes with their own harmonisation objectives. Promoting the added value of the PAQAF instruments and what they offer to different regions and systems is essential. PAQAF needs a clear communication strategy and to generate ownership via regional organisations which should also be its spokesperson.
- HAQAA and Tuning attempt to follow this logic: They are based on strong stakeholder involvement from five African regions. Both have been very consultative and participatory. The initiatives are complementary (addressing systems level quality assurance and study programme relevance, respectively).
- HAQAA and Tuning provide start-up funding but the continental harmonisation agenda in Africa requires a much longer, sustained commitment of stakeholders. The EU encourages beneficiaries of the Pan-African programme (of which HAQAA and Tuning are initiatives) to go-beyond and use the other EU instruments to develop further cooperation (Support instruments such as: Intra-Africa mobility scholarships, the Erasmus+ Capacity Building projects and the AfricaConnect initiative).

## **2. Quality assurance and study programme alignment must be based upon the strengthening of African university internal quality culture.**

- The European experience of the Bologna Process has shown that universities have to take quality assurance into their own hands in order for it to be sustainable and genuine. Universities are the first line of responsibility for QA.
- Many African universities do not have a QA Unit or established internal QA process. It is critical that there is leadership ownership of QA processes, in institutions and that the leadership also understands the continental tools and instruments and how they can be implemented and utilised.
- AAU has been the leading African partner and stakeholder in the HAQAA Initiative, which has been key in developing and promoting the ASG-QA. It also promotes, in tandem, the African Quality Rating Mechanism. AAU aims generate awareness for these tools across its university membership.
- The cooperation of national authorities, QA agencies and institutions is essential in the quality agenda. The ASG-QA is a guiding document that addresses all levels of quality assurance (institutional and regulatory) and their important interaction.
- The EU is encouraging EU-African university cooperation to be strengthened along these lines (the interplay of policy makers, regulatory bodies and HEI).
- Capacity development for self-assessment, data collection and management and generating internal quality culture are in high demand in Africa; All African and international tools for institutional quality assurance (e.g. ASG or the African Quality Rating Mechanism) can and should be used to this effect.
- Training of peers in quality assessment is also largely needed in Africa –The example of the agency reviews that HAQAA has facilitated, where African peers were used, was given as a good practice.

- 3. The African continental harmonisation agenda for higher education should draw upon important lessons learned from other world regions, while retaining its African particularity.**
- Tuning has been applied in different parts of the world and these experiences have been a source of information and inspiration for Africa.
  - QA is part of a broader process of regional integration. This has been a major lesson from Europe and from Southeast Asia.
  - In terms of certain features of the European Higher Education Area that have resonated with other regions as pertains to QA:
    - Respect for institutional autonomy: It was noted that there is an interest in improving governance in African universities, which is inherently linked.
    - Independence of external QA bodies and their decisions
    - Student participation in review panels
  - The African harmonisation process has also been distinct: The ASG-QA, for example, go into more detail on issues like societal engagement and e-learning than do the equivalent standards in Europe (ESG). This shows the particularity of what Africa conceived for its own development.
  - Two decades ago few universities in Europe had QA offices and external QA predominated. It took an effort to shift attention to internal QA. Africa has an opportunity to conceive both processes together as complementary.
- 4. The heterogeneity of African higher education systems and actors is a persistent challenge that must be addressed by initiatives that seek to generate buy-in for the African harmonisation agenda.**
- The issue of diversity within Africa was emphasized by the audience. The discussion highlighted:
    - The importance of synergies between diverse stakeholders when dealing with sustainable impact
    - The importance of building continental tools incrementally, based on existing systems and tools
    - Time and consistent investment (harmonisation is a long-term project)
    - The importance of continental initiatives, training and capacity building across linguistic lines in Africa and promoting knowledge sharing between African countries and agencies, not just from a North-South perspective.
  - TUNING creates a common language and tools for quality, African programmes, yet at the same time respects difference as something that can also be enriching in African HE. It has served to:
    - Build trust
    - Go beyond defining competencies for higher education and also shape programme development and teaching
    - Deal with the difficult issue of credits in an international setting
    - Profile quality teaching and showcase best-practices
- 5. Further support of EU to joint EU-Africa projects on Quality assurance (QA)- and relevance-issues is needed and welcome.**

The importance of generating synergies between different initiatives in which major African stakeholders are involved was stressed (national funding initiatives supporting QA in Africa, other EU projects – such as capacity building projects).

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Recommendations stem from a workshop that took place in the framework of the conference **“Investing in people, by investing in higher education and skills in Africa”**, organised by the European Commission, the African Union Commission, DAAD, British Council, Campus France and Nuffic on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2019 in Brussels.

The following speakers have contributed to the debate:

- Dr. Jeffy Mukora, Director, National Council for Quality Assurance and Accreditation, Mozambique
- Prof. Etienne Ehile, Secretary General, Association of African Universities, Ghana
- Dr. Matete Madiba, Tuning Coordinator, University of Pretoria, South Africa
- Deirdre Lennan, International Cooperation Officer, Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, European Commission
- Dr. Andree Sursock, Senior Expert, European University Association
- Dr. Yohannes Woldentensae, Senior Education Expert, Education Division, African Union Commission

Chair: Stefan Bienefeld, Head of development co-operation and transregional programmes, DAAD

Rapporteur: Elizabeth Colucci, HAQAA Initiative/Global Observatory

Presentations and further information are accessible on the [conference website](#).

