

# Quality Assurance of Cross-Border Higher Education – the state of the art

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European Association for the Quality Assurance of Higher Education (ENQA)  
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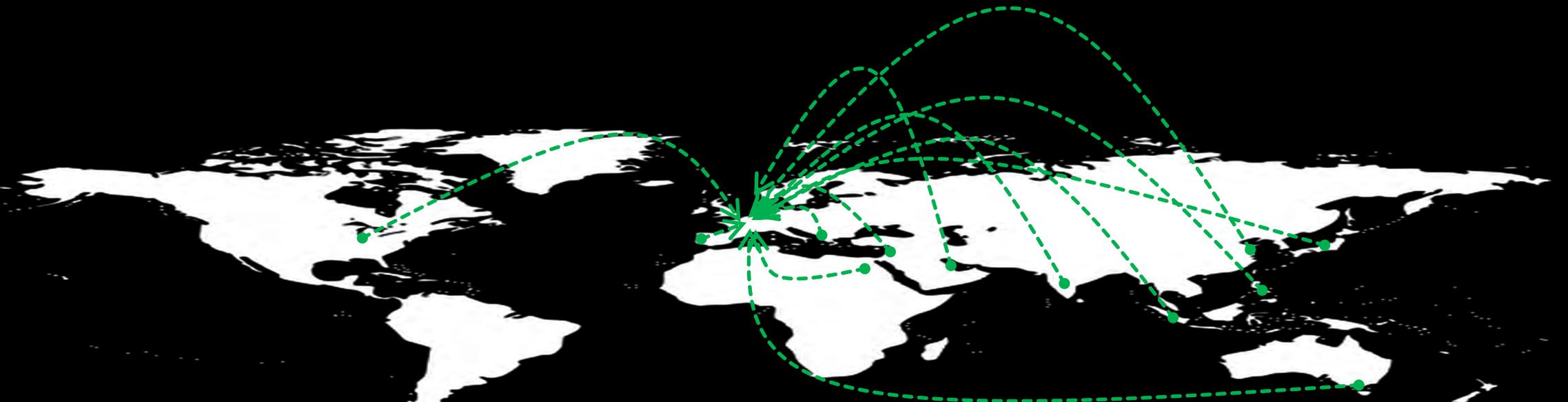
# Final conference

114 participants

38 nationalities

Colleagues representing different parts of the higher education community

→ End of a journey or a start of something new?



## First ideas for this project

2008 - A study on TNE by the Academic Cooperation Association for the European Commission

*While elaborating and adhering to a common European "transnational education strategy" may be something for the future, what should be focused on are ways of sharing good practice, collaboration in delivery of programmes abroad and coordinated action in supporting good quality cross-border provision. The improved and enhanced image of transnational education offered by European providers would be to the benefit of all.*



## First ideas for this project

Too little focus put on CBHE?

How to contribute to the internationalisation of European education?

An undefined territory?

What is the common approach? Is there such?

Who is involved? Who is responsible?



# Quality Assurance of Cross-Border Higher Education (QACHE)

- Co-Financing: Erasmus Mundus Programme of the European Union
- Oct 2013- Dec 2015
- Partnership: ENQA (coordinator)
- QA agencies: ANECA (Spain), GAC (Germany), HCERES (France), QAA (UK), TEQSA (Australia)
- Regional networks: APQN and ANQAHE



## Project aims

- Enhancing **policy dialogue** within Europe as well as between Europe and other world regions on QA of cross-border higher education → mutual understanding of different QA approaches
- Supporting the development of a **European dimension** in QA through common standards and shared principles by the European providers
- Developing the **international dimension** of higher education
- Facilitating and enhancing the **engagement of European higher education institutions** in cross-border higher education delivery
- Supporting the implementation of **international (OECD/UNESCO) and European standards and guidelines** on QA.
- Contributing to the **protection of students** against poor quality higher education provision (recognition of CBHE)



## Direct target groups

- European providers of cross-border higher education (higher education institutions)
- European quality assurance agencies
- Quality assurance agencies in countries outside of Europe

## Indirect target groups (long term)

- Students
- Policy makers in higher education on national and European levels
- Higher education sector

## Project's innovative aspect

The innovative side of the QACHE project is the creation of a common **European QA approach to cross-border higher education** which will contribute to the promotion of European higher education in other parts of the world.



# Project phases

## Phase 1 – Information gathering

- Regional networks' surveys (ENQA, APQN, ANQAHE)
- European providers' survey (ES, DE, FR, UK)
- Country reports (ES, DE, FR, UK, AUS)

## Phase 2 – Validation: Regional expert forums 2014-2015

- Europe (London, United Kingdom), Gulf (Manama, Bahrain), Asia (Macao, China)

## Phase 3 – Main outputs

- Toolkit
- Final conference November 2015
- Final reporting



## Phase 1: information gathering – European providers' survey

- Survey of selected HEIs in the core countries (DE, ES, FR and UK) known to be active in CBHE
- Questions asking about the extent and type of activities, target countries, the IQA and EQA systems, specific national support schemes and policies, collaboration with the host country authorities, well as any eventual good practice
- Challenging survey despite careful selection of respondents (47 institutions)
  - 21 responses, but most questions completed by less than half!
  - Misunderstanding of terminology and limited understanding of the phenomenon
  - Lack of knowledge on the QA process the programme(s) was (were) subjected to → unreliable or unusable responses
  - Contradictory responses re: the national system



# Phase 1: information gathering – European providers' survey

- First lesson: in most of the countries CBHE is not a well known phenomenon and terminology is difficult to understand
- People know of their own case, but not beyond that → not able to put their own case into a larger framework (e.g. analyse the typology of the provision, or the national context)
- National strategies, policies, guidelines and requirements are in most cases not well known (“yes”, “no”, and “I don't know” from HEIs in the same country) → no mainstreaming
- But neither is the institutional framework! → Unclear whether there is none, or it is not properly communicated to the programmes (not relevant?) → is there a strategic approach to CBHE or does it depend on individual initiative (only)?



## Phase 1: information gathering – country reports

- Australia, Germany, France, Spain, UK
- An intense data gathering period to understand what is actually going on in different countries.
- Many countries suffer from the lack of centrally collected information in CBHE
- Different (regulatory) approaches to CBHE
- Different levels of “maturity” as regards the system and volume of CBHE



## Phase 2: Validation of results – regional forum London, November 2014

- The opening of Pandora's box
- The diversity within Europe is overwhelming – are we missing the forest for the trees?
- Need for discussion among different counterparts; “we are in this together”
- Terminology needs clarifying!
- There is a lack of comprehensive, up-to-date information on the (QA of) CBHE concerning all counterparts of the process
- Where to start? What to do next?



## Phase 2: Validation of results— regional forum Manama, Bahrain, November 2014.

An honest, interactive dialogue between sending and receiving countries

- Getting to know each other
- Building of a collegial atmosphere
- Building of trust
- Understanding again that our challenges are similar

Interagency cooperation was seen as the way forward

- Recognition as the reoccurring issue
- Important input to the development of the Toolkit, highlighting the need to
  - consolidate the existing international guidelines
  - address the ‘trust gap’ between sending and receiving countries (role of networks)
  - the provision of up-to-date and comprehensive information on CBHE





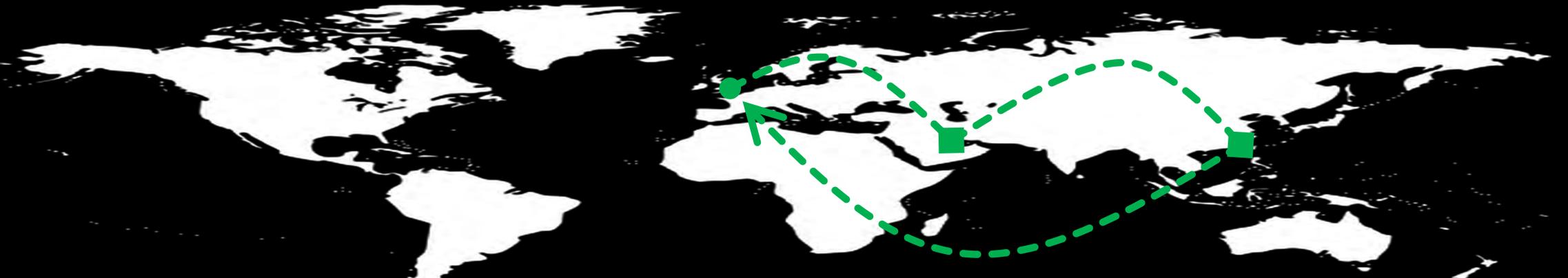
## Phase 2: Validation of results – regional forum, Macao, China, January 2015

- Open talk about bogus providers (white listing vs. black listing)
- Recognition issues reoccurring
- Ideas (idealistic ideas?) of real joint procedures, mutual recognition of QA procedures
- Strong will for strengthened cooperation between regions – the role of regional networks and the narrowing of the trust gap



## Phase 3: the Toolkit

- An attempt to summarise the project findings, easier said than done!
- Aims to complement existing guidelines, such as the UNESCO/APQN Toolkit's (2006) effort to support the implementation of the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines (2004)
- Offers guidance on how QA agencies can realise the mutual understanding, trust and cooperation that are required to 'share the responsibility of quality assuring CBHE' (UNESCO/OECD)



## What did we learn so far?

CBHE is a global, expanding phenomenon that can cover several forms of education provision:

- Double/joint programmes
- Offshore campuses
- Networks
- Mergers
- Virtual education
- Many others (expansion and development)



## What did we learn so far?

Regulation of and information about CBHE is patchy:

- Absence of a common approach to CBHE
- Absence of developed QA systems for CBHE
- Absence of comprehensive data about CBHE
- Lack of reciprocal understanding, by sending and receiving country agencies, of the regulatory frameworks in their respective jurisdictions



## What did we learn so far?

There is a need to enhance the national and international oversight of CBHE - responsibility!

Strengthening inter-agency cooperation is seen as the way forward in

- the promotion of mutual understanding
- the sharing information and good practice
- the building of trust



## What did we learn so far?

Regional networks (ENQA, ANQAHE, APQN...) are seen as key players in facilitating information sharing and strengthened cooperation.

Cooperation, responsibility, sharing of information, dialogue, trust



## What did we learn so far?

- CBHE does not only pose challenges, but it also creates great opportunities: it is widening access to higher education, addressing skills gaps and furthering global citizenship.
- It is essential to explore ways to work together to fully harness the opportunities posed by CBHE while avoiding its possible challenges and shortcomings, and in particular sub-standard education provision.
- The shared goal is to facilitate the provision of quality CBHE, avoid regulatory gaps, and unnecessary discrepancies and duplication, in the ultimate interest of higher education providers and students.

*(Trifiro, F. (2015): Quality Assurance of Cross-Border Higher Education (QACHE) – moving towards strengthened cooperation)*



