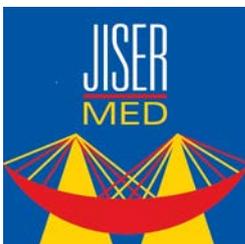




AGENCIA NACIONAL DE EVALUACIÓN  
DE LA CALIDAD Y ACREDITACIÓN

# **JISER-MED Project**

## **Report on the activities of the Quality Dimension January – November 2011**



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## 1. BACKGROUND AND APPROACH

This report covers the activities accomplished within the Quality Dimension of the JISER-MED Project from January to November 2011. These initiatives have been co-ordinated by ANECA as the partner of the Project in charge of the Quality Dimension and have been aligned with the Universitat of Barcelona institution in charge of co-ordinating the project.

Furthermore, a special attention is paid to the strengthening alliances with some quality assurance agencies from Southern Europe in order to build a platform with the bodies in charge of the external quality assurance processes in the countries of the higher education institutions involved in the Project.

This approach is highly in the agenda of the main international quality assurance networks which ANECA belongs to: the European Association for Quality Assurance, ENQA, one of the stakeholders' within the European Higher Education Area; and the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies for Higher Education, INQAAHE, the global organisation where the different regional networks convene.

The current strategy within these multinational bodies, deals with two of the main objectives defined in the quality dimension of the JISER-Med project:

1. Promoting capacity building among those countries or regions lacking formalised quality assurance mechanisms at both the internal and external level
2. Exploring the definition of shared harmonised criteria on external quality assurance at the regional level

The first objective is largely included in the general focus of the JISER-MED Project as far as some of the higher education institutions (HEI) involved in the project are included within areas where formalised quality assurance mechanisms have not yet been implemented. Putting the HIEs at the very centre of the Project, the Quality Dimension will adequate its messages and analysis to be readable and feasible to all institutions regardless the quality assurance context they belong to. The experience of some of the agencies taking part in the project in promoting and supporting internal quality assurance systems at the institutional level as part of their national strategy, but also in collaboration scenarios at the international one.

The second objective, although not included explicitly in the rationale of the JISER-MED Project, is a natural consequence of the first one and, more precisely, turns into a favourable synergy for the Project as a whole and particularly for a future possible offspring of JISER-MED. The definition of harmonised quality assurance criteria or standards as a way to foster international cooperation and to facilitate the building of higher education areas, is one of the main working areas for the networks all over the world.

After the pioneer work represented by the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance of Higher Education (ESG) defined by the E-4 Group within the framework of the European Higher Education Area and approved by the ministries of the Bologna Process in the Bergen Communiqué in May 2005, other associations and networks have made a similar effort in putting together similarities on quality assurance principles to advance in higher education collaboration, while the natural national differences could also be maintained as part of the need for idiosyncratic cultural higher education environments.

The identification of these generic criteria would immediately favour mobility of students and graduates from HEIs and systems aligned to

harmonised (recognised) quality assurance criteria. And mobility is clearly at the heart of JISER-MED Project.

This approach was submitted by Zulima Fernández, Director of ANECA in the International *Seminar JISER-MED, The state of the Euro-Mediterranean Higher Education Area*, organised by the University of Barcelona, as co-ordinator of the Project in Barcelona on 17 January 2011 and was the first official act of the Project.

The JISER-MED Project allows working out these criteria in a very unique context, the crossroads comprised by the regions surrounding the Mediterranean Basin: Southern Europe, North Africa and the Middle East.

JISER-MED is in an unique position of reflecting on the possibility to identify a small group of core criteria shared by the stakeholders involved in the project with such a different cultural and historical backgrounds, in order to subsequently define them in a more particular way within the framework of the project whether the time span allows it.

With this objective ahead, JISER-MED could be placed at the spearhead the inter-networks dialogue and the debate on the general quality assurance criteria at the international level, providing with particular and empirical work to support advances in this field.

## **2. THE QUALITY DIMENSION: STRATEGY AND TASKS ACCOMPLISHED**

In order to achieve the aforementioned objectives established by the Director of ANECA Prof. Zulima Fernández. ANECA contacted the following quality assurance agencies of the countries participating in the Project: Agence d'évaluation de la recherche et de l'enseignement supérieur, AERES

(France), Agència per a la qualitat del sistema universitari de Catalunya, AQU-Catalunya (Catalonia, Spain) and the Agència de Qualitat de l'Ensenyament Superior d'Andorra AQUA (Andorra) from the European side. Throughout the development of the project, contacts were also made with the Higher Education Accreditation Commission, HEAC of Jordan as the only existing agency in the Near East.

The definition of this platform could be considered as a collateral benefit of the Project towards the awareness of a real Euro-Mediterranean quality assurance environment. This group of agencies could bring their experiences from the European quality assurance theatre to reinforce the debate to advance in the building of a Euro-Mediterranean higher education area proposing a particular approach to the three-region context.

The intention of the members of this platform is to incorporate other bodies in charge of quality assurance policies, apart from the agencies, in those countries where these structures have not been set up, such as the case of the North African countries.

The purpose of this platform is not to promote the creation of quality assurance agencies in the countries where these bodies do not exist. Rather, to contribute to the enhancement of quality assurance mechanisms at the internal level of the higher education institutions on the one hand, and at the external level with regard to the evaluation procedures defined in the area.

**Meeting of the representatives of the University of Barcelona and the Director and representatives of ANECA with the Minister of Higher Education and Research and the President of the Higher Education Accreditation Council of Jordan. 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> May 2011.**

From the point of view of the Quality Dimension of the Project, the visit had a twofold objective: on the one hand, to invite the Minister of Higher

Education and Research, Dr. Wajih M. Owais, to the Seminar on the Quality Dimension included in the proposal of the Project that would be held in Amman in November 2011; and, on the other hand, to invite the President of the Higher Education Accreditation Council of Jordan, Professor Munib M. Saket, to play a more active role in the JISER-MED Project as a whole, as the only agency establish in the Middle East, as well as to take part in the JISER-QA Group.

### **JISER-QA Meeting, Madrid, 14<sup>th</sup> June 2011**

In order to achieve this goal, the quality assurance platform of JISER-MED (hereafter, *JISER-QA*) met in Madrid on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2011. The main outcome of this meeting can be summarised as follows.

1. The Quality Dimension should focus on the internal QA mechanisms of the higher education institutions (henceforth HEI) involved in JISER-MED and it should also be closely linked to the broad objectives and rationale identified in the Project:

*JISER-MED will establish and develop synergies and long-standing relations between the EU and the MED region by: (i) improving services for MED students and doctoral candidates in EU HE; (ii) increasing the international dimension of quality assurance for HE from a Mediterranean perspective, (iii) Strengthening relations between European higher education and research; (iv) contributing to the interdisciplinary policy debate in furtherance of increased participation and mutual understanding among different stakeholders of both regions.*

2. An emphasis is made on the fact that the international dimension of QA should not only be a means in itself but a driving force to promote and recognise the international capacities of universities in the area. Therefore, the *QA Dimension* should be oriented to the general objectives of the project. It must also deal with a twofold objective in terms of internationalization: QA agencies produce international

information for students on the one hand and they contribute to the internationalization of the programmes at the national level on the other hand.

3. This issue stems directly with the problem of recognition on a broader sense. Recognition is therefore *embedded* in the whole project in different levels: recognition of study periods, recognition and joint-programmes and the practicalities and restrictions derived from mobility.
4. The group agrees that the first step of the working group on the QA Dimension of the Project would be to define the state-of-the-art of the internal QA processes in the HEIs that take part in the Project. This could help to identify common trends in internal QA processes in the Euro-Mediterranean Area at the HEI level.
5. Once this goal at the institutional level has been achieved, the focus will be shifted on the corresponding national frameworks that define the external processes and their regional architectures, where they have been defined: Southern Europe, Northern Africa and the Middle East. This could lead to identify broad standards at the regional level favouring the inter-regional dialogue on QA issues (ENQA-ANQAHE-INQAAHE).
6. The group agrees on the importance of building a common approach within the Euro-Med Region on Quality Assurance as a tool to achieve the general goals of higher education in the region. It makes a plea for the need to avoid the European approach on internal and external QA principles oriented to achieve refined procedures but forgetting the final product and the specific quality goals of the programme/institution, the students and employers.

The JISER-QA Group also discussed an agenda for the Quality Dimension of the Project. There was a general agreement on aligning the QA Dimension

to the general objectives of the JISER-MED Project avoiding to create a super-structure of its own.

The group agrees in defining a questionnaire on the internal QA processes to be aimed at their HEIs to draw a map of the current mechanisms in the three areas of the Project. This map could also be used as a framework for the external QA processes to be applied at the Project level.

The discussion then goes on the minimum number of items that will allow the working group to set up the diagnosis of the internal QA mechanisms of the HEIs involved.

The Group agrees using the surveys already designed within the European Higher Education Area, such as the Data Collection on Quality Assurance which is part of the stock-taking material for the Ministerial Conference of 2012, although the main focus is on the external processes could provide a reference point at the European level with the Standards and Guidelines as main background. Others proposals tested at the national level, such as the Spanish reference for internal QA systems established in the legal framework for programme accreditation will be also taken into account:

*Quality assurance system*

*The information included under this clause can be aimed at either a particular QA system at the programme level or at the higher education institution level.*

- a) Person in charge of the quality assurance system at the programme level.*
- b) Procedures of assessment and quality improvement of the teaching received and the academic staff.*
- c) Procedures to assure the quality of the internships and mobility programmes.*

- d) *Procedures to analyse the success of the integration of graduates in the labour market, as well as the satisfaction with the academic training received and its impact in the review and improvement of the programme.*
- e) *Procedure to analyse the satisfaction of the different interest groups involved (students, academic staff, administrative staff, etc.) and attention paid to suggestions and complaints and, where appropriate, their impact in the review and improvement of the programme.*
- f) *Specific criteria in case the programme will be cancelled.*

All these proposals share the European Standards and Guidelines as a reference point from the European theatre.

The group agrees in defining a short questionnaire including those basic references to the existence of mechanisms within the HEIs oriented to provide with feedback to the management, academic and administrative staff for reviewing and improving the level of performance. Furthermore, the questionnaire should focus on the existence of national and/or international frameworks to define external QA mechanisms at the institutional or programme level.

Finally, the JISER-QA Group discuss a first draft of the agenda of the *JISER-MED Conference on Quality Assurance, Employability and Internationalisation*, coorganised along with the Princess Sumaya University for Technology in Amman, Jordan on the 21st and 22nd November 2011. The group discussed the different sessions which the Conference will be divided in as well as the profile of the speakers. The members agreed on sending the draft proposal to the co-ordinators of the JISER-MED Project in the University of Barcelona, as well as Abdullah Al-Zoubi, co-ordinator of the organization of the Conference in the Princess Sumaya University (PSUT).

**Meeting in Madrid with Abdullah Al-Zoubi, representative of the Proncess Sumaya University of Technology in the Project as well as co-ordinator of the Conference on the Quality Dimension to be held in November 2011.**

The focus of this meeting was to discuss in detail the draft agenda of the Conference in November submitted by the JISER-QA Group after its meeting in June.

The meeting is organised in Madrid by ANECA and take part representatives from OBREAL, University of Barcelona, ANECA and PSUT.

Over the meeting, Professor Al-Zoubi suggests the names of the Jordanian experts that could take part in the different sessions of the conference. Furthermore, he informs that the Minister of Higher Education and Research, Dr. Wajih M. Owais, has been replaced in his position by Dr. Rowaida Al-Maaitah, former Rector of the Hashemite University. Therefore, the invitation to the opening ceremony has to be sent to the latter.

The draft agenda of the Conference is improved after the suggestions from the Jordan side and includes a wide representation of the different institutions that take part in the JISER-MED Project and a particular attention has been paid to avoid, following the suggestions of the JISER-QA Group, focusing mainly on quality assurance in an autonomous way. Everybody agrees on considering quality assurance as a means to achieve the major objectives of the project: mobility and employability.

All the attendees to the meeting agrees on the fact that a balance on the topics and on the speakers representing different contexts and particularities has been met.

**JISER-QA Meeting, Barcelona, 10<sup>th</sup> September 2011**

The meeting of the JISER-QA Group held in Barcelona had an almost monographic point in the agenda: the preparation of the *JISER-MED Conference on Quality Assurance, Employability and Internationalisation*, on 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> November 2011.

The main topic deals with the focus of the different sessions to avoid duplications or overlapping among the presentations related to quality, as well as to identify relevant moderators and chairs for the sessions.

***JISER-MED Conference on Quality Assurance, Employability and Internationalisation. Co-organised by Princess Sumaya University for Technology and ANECA. Amman, Jordan 21<sup>st</sup> 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2011.***

The Conference was opened by the Rector of the University of Barcelona, Didac Ramírez, the Director of ANECA, the President of the Princess Sumaya University of Technology, Dr. Issa Batarseh, Zulima Fernández and the Minister of Higher Education and Research of Jordan Dr. Rowaida Al-Maaitah.

The attendants to the conference were mainly from the partners and associates of the HISER-MED Project, as well as a number of Jordan vice-rectors and professors and people interested in the internationalisation of higher education sector. The conclusions of the two-day conference were read by Zulima Fernández, Director of ANECA at the closing of the Conference. Among other speakers can be highlighted Sami Gammoh, Minister of Industry and Trade of Jordan and Akel Biltaji, Chair of Tourism and Heritage Committee and Senator of the Upper House of Parliament of Jordan.

The conclusions will reinforce and feed the next steps of the Project in the different dimensions. Among these conclusions can be derived the followings related to the three dimensions represented in the agenda.

The subtitle of the Conference could be, *Quality Assurance & Employability & Internationalization: The three aspects in the context of Higher Education aiming at breaking barriers.*

### The contexts

QA in HE:

- It should be understood as in the Standards & Guidelines in HE from ENQA (or equivalent such as INQAHE, ...).
- QA includes internal QA at universities, external evaluation, agencies, etc.

Employability of HE

- New and better jobs for the future together with LLL
- Employability is taken as a set of achievements (skills, understandings and personal attributes) that makes benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy.
- Employability goes well beyond the simplistic notion of key skills, and is evidenced in the application of a mix of personal qualities and beliefs, understandings, skilful practices and the ability to reflect productively on experience.
- The goal to be achieved by HE institutions: embedding employability into the curriculum.

### Internationalization in HE

How the international component in HE can be understood?

- Internationalization means that HE institutions (and countries) define new degrees such that other HE institutions (in other countries) automatically recognize them (but this requires transparency and mutual trust).
- Internationalization means that HE institutions in different countries should design and offer joint degrees.

### The links among all these components

#### QA & Employability

- QA should help HE institutions to monitor employment rates and to act (and react) accordingly (by modifying how they deliver their current degrees, by adapting them to the local or global employment contexts, by introducing new degree proposals, by ...)
- QA should strongly promote the embedding of employability into the curriculum

#### QA & Internationalization

- First barrier to break: QA should be the basis of transparency and mutual trust for HE in order to get greater comparability, better recognition and an improved mobility.
- Second barrier to break: QA (and QA agencies) must strongly facilitate the way HE institutions offer joint degrees (the MULTRA agreements is a good example of this).

### Employability & Internationalisation

- Academic comparability, academic recognition and academic mobility (for academic purposes) are the first step (moving with awards easily from one HE institution to another) to achieve when talking about

employability and internationalization. And, in some regions like the EHEA, this goal has been achieved. But, when talking about professionals, this is much more complicated ... (here the barriers are very complex).

- If mobility is one of the faces of the employability polyhedral then:
  - ✓ Labels (such as ABBET, Eur-Ace, ...) are one of the tools coming from internationalization that can improve employability.
  - ✓ Joint degrees by HE institutions in different countries, for many reasons, clearly open many employment windows to their students.

### **3. SEMINARS AND EVENTS RELATED TO THE PROJECT AND ATTENDED BY ANECA**

“Euro-Mediterranean Higher Education Area. Enhancing Quality, Promoting Mobility and Employability”. Barcelona, 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2011. Co-organised between the Institute of the Mediterranean, IEMed and ANECA.

The Conference convened people in charge of the most important political and developmental organisations related to the Euro-Mediterranean region: the European Union, World Bank, the Union for the Mediterranean, UNESCO and OECD, as well as representatives from higher education institutions of the Maghreb and the networks of universities which work in the Mediterranean area, EPUF and EMUNI. From the side of the quality assurance agencies attended the conference the heads of ANECA, AQU-Catalunya, AERES, United Arab Emirates (which also represented the regional network of quality assurance agencies, ANQAHE).

The objective of this workshop was to discuss the draft paper submitted by the international expert on quality assurance, Nickolas Harris (former director for enhancement of QAA-UK and currently international advisor of ANECA) on the improvement of quality of higher education in the Euro-Mediterranean Area promoting mobility and employability. The draft document was analysed and discussed in order to close a final paper that will be published by IEMed and will be the basis for future debates on quality assurance and higher education in the area. Furthermore, the Conference invited some projects on higher education in the Euro-Mediterranean Area to be presented. Among these projects was JISER-MED who was presented by Ramón Torrent.

The purpose of the Conference was also to provide the political actors in the Mediterranean region with technical information to favour the political decision making on the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean Higher Education Area, following the Catania and Cairo declarations, allowing better conditions to the students of the region.

## **4. CONCLUSIONS**

What is the relevance of quality assurance in higher education and the potential benefits for the Area?

Higher education supposes a mayor opportunity for Euro-Med today, but, at the same time it implies some risk. Perhaps the most important of them is that we can have a highly trained population but unemployed.

Even more, most of the countries all over the world have developed an external quality assurance system based on agencies. But, more important than the number of agencies, is the activity that they do and have done over the past two decades. During this period of time, the quality of higher

education has experienced a radical change. Twenty years ago, it was not a concern in universities; now, quality, enhancement and excellence are all part of the normal academic conversation, and an essential element of modernization of the higher education systems.

University is no longer the ivory tower that it used to be. Now, it has to work in a very challenging world. During the last few years the demand for higher education has greatly increased. Since society is increasingly knowledge-based, higher education is becoming more and more important for the progress of both individuals and countries.

In reply, the number and variety of HEIs have grown enormously everywhere and the massification of the institutions is in some countries a major issue to be addressed. Now, we have a wide range of HEIs that demand more transparency and public accountability from the institutions.

HEIs are so different that stakeholders do not have enough information about them and their activities. HEIs require differentiating themselves and, also, they need to be trustworthy for society. Therefore, they need to signal the quality of their research and teaching. At the same time, many HEIs and systems have to identify either references for quality or technical support and resources to set up a quality assurance system.

These are problems that can be solved by external QAAs. Transparency, trust, advising are some of the contributions of QAAs. Quality assurance is a basic element of improvement, but could never be an end in itself, only a means; it must add value to universities and their stakeholders. The concern about the procedures and routines should not turn them into a ritual. QA should never forget its goal is the improvement of teaching and/or research done by universities

The main goal of quality agencies is to enhance HEI quality; but quality is a moving target; there is always room for improvement. The current quality trend is to focus on continual improvement and effectiveness; rather than

focusing just on fulfilling specific standards. Summing up, there is a shift from compliance to performance. The HEIs and agencies have to use quality assessment as a management tool to monitor, promote and sustain continual improvement. Our concern for efficiency should not allow us to forget about effectiveness. Higher education QA is the responsibility for higher education institutions.

Mobility and employability are the two main topics that this workshop addresses and both are a major issue for higher education all over the world. But, how are they related each other to quality?

From the point of view of mobility of students and graduates, quality assurance agencies try to collaborate in networks to remove the technical obstacles that difficult the recognition of periods of study and the recognition of degrees based upon accreditation decisions.

Of course, to achieve these important goals ministries of education and/or official recognition bodies have to give the political approval. But quality assurance agencies have shown that, from the viewpoint of the technical issues it is not that difficult to come to mutual recognition scenarios.

Employability is a major concern not only for students and higher education stakeholders but also for society as a whole. Quality assurance agencies have done a big effort to identify criteria and indicators to be included in their evaluation processes. The current approach in quality assurance on the assessment of learning outcomes shows clearly that the graduates of those have acquired the necessary competences to meet the expectations of the employers.

As we all do believe that “quality is a journey not a destination” quality must work as a vehicle to facilitate the task of our universities in an internationalized context. It is a means not a goal in itself. Therefore, quality assurance processes must serve to the main objective to promote a more internationalised higher education and student mobility.

How to achieve this goal? The building of a quality assurance system for the higher education institutions in the Euro-MED area is a long process that includes a several steps:

- a) establishing a set of common criteria, which define the internal quality assurance of the universities, using the European experience and incorporating the academic needs/requirements of our partners
- b) promoting the consolidation of the internal and the external higher education quality assurance in the higher education systems of the countries involved in the project
- c) developing ways of cooperation in the Euro-Mediterranean Region, that implies:
  - ✓ to create a Euro-Mediterranean quality assurance platform, based on the European experience and the needs of the other regions involved: North Africa and Middle East and South Europe
  - ✓ To support the building of external quality assurance systems in the countries that considers the need to set up a QA agency. We are not interested in creating another super-structure of agencies. Our purpose is to promote the dialogue among regional networks, following the recommendation of organizations such as UNESCO or INQAAHE, the International Network of QA Agencies at global level.

To achieve this goal, some fruitful experiences developed in other Areas such as Europe or Latin America can be explored in the Euro-Mediterranean Area.

ANECA will put all its background and experience and the capability to involve the relevant actors in this play to do our best in contributing to achieve the general objectives of the JISER-MED Project according to the proposal approved.



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