

## ARQATA project – a Joint effort

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Ladies and gentlemen,  
Bari or,

You already had the pleasure to meet the NVAO chair Karl Dittrich presenting his paper on quality assurance being a must and a chance. He talked about quality enhancement on programme level, about the importance of content over procedures, about the ownership of quality lying with teaching staff and students.

You know by now that being involved in quality assurance is often a challenge and always interesting. You can be critical, and you should not be too easily pleased. There is always room for improvement. Not one dull moment. As Paul Rullmann (Delft University of Technology) said: quality is an event, a process, not a thing. So quality assurance should keep you busy at all times.

Now let me guide you through the aims and objectives of the ARQATA project, and explain very roughly what we are doing.

ARQATA is a joint project. Yesterday Rolf Heusser (president ECA) underlined the importance of joint efforts. Indeed, this presentation itself is a joint effort:

1. ANQA and NVAO present the project;
2. Representatives of ANQA, NVAO, universities and students present the first outcomes;
3. And four concurrent round table discussions with management, faculty, quality assurance staff and students will start in roughly one hour.

A joint project with a joint presentation. And then the first question is: who are the people engaged in this project? Who are the parties involved? Universities, national and international experts, the ministry of Education and the World Bank, ANQA and NVAO. We work together in good partnership. And Margarita Shahverdyan already referred to the importance of working as a team. All parties are well motivated to play their respective part, and they do so with vigour and perseverance.

The project distinguishes five lines which are obviously intertwined. I have been listening very carefully to all previous speakers and also to Sargis Tovmasyan (Yerevan State University of Architecture and Construction) when he talked about quality assurance as a package. ARQATA comes in a package.  
– internal quality assurance and external quality assurance both at universities and ANQA;  
– and quality culture involving all stakeholders.

The focus in Line 1 on internal quality assurance in eight universities has been on training and the development of tools. These will eventually result in a quality assurance handbook. Two universities will continue in Line 2 on external quality assurance. The Yerevan State University and the Yerevan State Medical University will undergo a pilot institutional audit and a programme assessment in 2013. Line 3 concerns the further professionalisation of ANQA with many training sessions. Also ANQA will be assisted in developing a quality assurance handbook. In the end, ANQA will undergo a proof external review. Line 4 on quality culture especially is intertwined with all other lines. International study tours – one to the Netherlands and Flanders, the other to Switzerland – should further develop quality culture in Armenian higher education. Representatives of ANQA, universities, students and the ministry of Education are part of the delegation of six. Line 5 – Implementation – concentrates on the impact of the project on quality enhancement of Armenian higher education.

Pilots are tests facilitating the learning process. Pilots on institutional and programme level are meant to help Armenian stakeholders to implement and improve an effective quality assurance system. The pilot procedures will be similar to the official accreditation procedures, but there will also be major differences. For instance the panel will visit the university only once, and there will be no audit trails. The pilots will result in assessment reports of a partial accreditation procedure. Therefore, the reports cannot be used as a basis for a formal accreditation decision. However, generous transitional arrangements can probably be extended to HEIs having participated in the pilots, but this is a decision to be taken by the Armenian government.

As to the time line, in the coming months we will focus on the guidance and assistance of HEIs writing their SER. We will organise a final training in December 2012, and the SERs should be ready by the first of February 2013. The site visits are to take place in March. The outcomes of the pilots will be presented at a conference in May 2013. In the meantime, ANQA will prepare itself for an ENQA proof review to take place in September 2013. And a year from now, we will organise another conference to present the outcomes of that proof external review.

One last thing I want to draw your attention to: good partnership is the result of good communication. Indeed, communication and knowledge sharing within the project is a key factor for success. The project website is fully operational so that all stakeholders are well informed and involved so as to fully benefit from the cooperation.

One significant concern in the communication is certainly the language barrier given the simple fact that we do not master the Armenian language, and some of you have difficulties with English. But somehow we manage, and we simply refuse to be discouraged by this slight inconvenience. But remember: none of us are native speakers of English; it is simply the lingua franca in higher education. Nothing more, nothing less.

And being Belgian (not Dutch) I can say *merci*, as I learned that you use the French word to say thank you.