

# **Quality Assurance Systems – the difficulties in providing a global unified system for Surveyors.**

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## **SUMMARY**

This paper will analyse the difficulties in providing a global quality assurance system for Surveyors. Using case studies from the United Kingdom and elsewhere opportunities for harmonising Quality Assurance systems will be explored. The difficulties in moving towards common quality assurance systems will be analysed. Possible alternatives in the form of the development a knowledge bank of mutual agreements and top up qualifications will be investigated. The paper also looks at the role of FIG in promoting mobility of labour across national boundaries.

This paper relates directly to the work of the Commission 2 Work Plan which has established a Working Group 2.4 – Accreditation and Quality Assurance. This working group, chaired by the author, is investigating cross border quality assurances in Surveying Education. This paper continues that work.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper investigates quality assurance programmes underpinning surveying courses. It looks at the situation in England providing an analyses of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) and its relationship with the national quality assurance organisation called the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). Standards set down at a European level are explored and a short comparison with Australia is provided. Barriers to international mobility of surveying services are explored through the need for licences on top of academic and professional quality assurance requirements.

## 2. QUALITY ASSURANCE AT A NATIONAL LEVEL

The United Kingdom (UK) system of quality assurance is complicated by the fact that the UK is by its very nature a federation of nations. This paper will look at the situation in England in terms of quality assurance but at times it relates to the UK as a whole. The UK has a ladder of quality assurance systems for education starting at school level and finishing at postdoctoral/professional levels. An outline of this ladder follows.

### 2.1 National Qualifications Framework

The national curriculum for children aged five to sixteen underpins school education in England and perhaps forms a base level of standards (Direct Gov, 2012). These are quality assured by an organisation known as Ofsted. There is an overlap with 16-19 provision delivered by a network of schools, general further education colleges and sixth form colleges. These are also quality assured by Ofsted. Private sector schools and public schools (a more traditional name for private education often including a boarding facility) may or may not be exempt from government inspections depending on whether they are in receipt of government funding. There are eight categories of educational provision covered by the National Qualifications Framework:

1	GCSEs grades D-G
2	GCSEs grade A*-C
3	A Levels
4	Certificates of Higher Education
5	HNCs and HNDs
6	BTEC advanced professional qualifications
7	Advanced Diplomas
8	Specialist awards.

## 2.2 The Higher Education Framework

Following on and overlapping the National Qualifications Framework, the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) has been produced for the higher education system in England. These are overseen from a quality assurance point of view by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). Levels start at 4 in order to link with the National Qualifications Framework:

4	Certificates in Higher Education and Higher National Certificates
5	Diplomas of Higher Education, Foundation Degrees, Higher National Diplomas
6	Bachelors Degree and with honours, Professional Graduate Certificate in Education
7	Masters Degrees, (integrated Master's degrees, postgraduate certificates, postgraduate diplomas)
8	Doctoral degrees.

As well as the QAA there are three other organisations involved: Office of Qualifications and Examination Regulation; UK NARIC and Ofqual – Office of 'qualification recognition'.

## 3 QUALITY ASSURANCE – UNIVERSITY PROVISION

University provision in England started in the 12<sup>th</sup> century with the formation of Oxford and Cambridge Universities (Cambridge University, 2012). Considerable expansion followed but it was not until 1992 with the creation of the new universities that an integrated provision of surveying education could be found with a move away from a bifurcated system of University and Polytechnic education. Before this time quality assurance in the Polytechnics were overseen by the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) and the Universities issued their degrees on the basis of their Royal Charter. The creation of the new universities led to the establishment of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (Hefce), supporting these two agencies are a number of Research Councils. Concern over the need for professionalism in University education following the Dearing Report led to the formation of the Higher Education Academy an organisation involved in raising professional standards in higher education. In terms of Quality Assurance the most significant Agency is the QAA which has the responsibility for assuring standards and improving quality of UK higher education. The starting point for understanding quality assurance administered by the QAA is the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education [QAA], 2004-2010) which outlines a series of frameworks (QAA, 2008) for higher education qualifications in England and Wales which provides the following services:

- Improving standards
- Institutional Review
- Peer review
- Reference points

Internationally many other countries operate a similar model to the UK system of quality assurance. Australia for example has recently seen the establishment of the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) which will monitor quality and set standards across the tertiary sector. At first sight it appears to be a very similar organisation to the QAA (QAA, 2012). This moves forward a structure established in 2000 in the form of Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) (Universities Australia, 2010).

#### **4 BOLOGNA**

As can be seen the provision of qualifications in England, let alone the UK, is somewhat complicated. As a result in the late nineties a movement was started to promote the harmonisation of standards in Europe (Cemmel & Bekhradnia, 2008). The Bologna declaration was signed by 29 countries in 1999. Its intention was to promote a movement towards harmonisation of standards in Europe and beyond, rather than insist on rules. As different school systems across Europe vary so much in terms of year structure the Bologna declaration suggested levels (The Higher Education Academy [HEA], n.d.). The level system in itself creates a difficulty, for example in England under the guidance of the Engineering Council many Universities offer an integrated four year master's programme known as an MEng. The Master's level aspect of the programme takes place over two semesters and relates to 120 M level credits. An MSc programme in England, however, usually contains 180 credits. In many countries in Europe a Masters degree takes place over two years and perhaps relates to 360 credits in an English University. The declaration declared an intent to iron out these anomalies but there is a very long way to go yet. Some EC nations have taken the Bologna declaration very seriously and others have not. It is further complicated by historical traditions of naming degrees which vary between countries and even vary in a multi nation country such as the United Kingdom (QAA, 2011). To overcome some of these problems the EC has developed credit rating system known as ECTS but this has been arguably very slow to develop. The long and short of it being that what might be regarded as a degree in one country might mean something very different in another.

#### **5 QUALITY ASSURANCE ROYAL INSTITUTION OF CHARTERED SURVEYORS**

The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors [RICS], 2012a) with around 100,000 qualified members and over 50,000 students and trainees in some 140 countries, regards itself as the world's leading professional qualification in land, property, construction and their associated environmental issues.

The evolution of the RICS has created a very broad based property profession. This development is partly reflected in the nature of the UK which is a diverse and densely populated country. The development of education for Surveyors has been through many

stages. The gold standard is attainment of Chartered status by the individual and use the designation MRICS (Member) or FRICS (Fellow). There are two main ways of studying firstly through a correspondence course, and secondly through attendance at higher education establishments. The 1970's saw the creation of the Polytechnics and a growth of full and part time courses where many surveying courses were developed. These polytechnics, as has been stated earlier, were changed into Universities in 1992 and the provision of surveying courses then moved across into the 'old' university sector. These courses, as they led to a route to professional membership, were always regarded as high status with elite universities such as Cambridge University having a long term interest in Land Economy. (Cambridge University, 2010) A property recession in 1990 led to major changes in surveying education - difficulties in finding employment for property students in fierce competition with Law and Business Studies students meant that the RICS had to rethink its strategy. This came to a head in the RICS policy of Agenda for Change which coincided with the Millennium.

Agenda for change saw the development of Partnership agreements with the University/Higher Education sector. Minimum threshold agreements were set for educational establishments if they were to achieve Partnership status. These included minimum school leaving standards, departmental research targets and employment targets. The logic of this was to raise standards in the profession so that the RICS could compete in the global market place. It also saw the expansion of post graduate entry into the profession.

In terms of quality assurance in the University Sector there are perhaps two RICS key policy statements the Policy and Guidance on University Partnerships (RICS, 2008) and Policy and procedures for accredited courses (RICS, 2009). The RICS no longer runs its own professional examinations preferring to develop a limited number of partnerships with recognised centres of academic excellence across the world. Through this the RICS has established threshold standards in the UK as well as Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, New Zealand, South Africa and other countries. These standards are linked to the European Credit Transfer System. Courses must comply with: threshold standards; study hours; credits; mapping to an APC pathway and on postgraduate courses 75% must have an undergraduate degree. There are sub policies for franchised courses and distance learning. External quality assurance is provided through the appointment of external examiners and reports are fed back into partnership meetings

Threshold standards for courses have to vary from country to country as the school and college system can be very different. As a result the RICS has produced a series of different threshold tariffs. For the UK the basic criteria are as follows:

#### Minimum standards

Student selection threshold

Research and innovation threshold

Teaching quality threshold

Employment threshold criteria

External Examiner data

Broadly this means: that 75% of undergraduates must meet a minimum entry score based on their School results; there must be a satisfactory research and innovation grading; there must be a relevant teaching quality score of confidence and finally 75% of graduating students should obtain relevant employment.

### **Routes to professional membership**

The starting point for professional membership for most people is to attend an RICS accredited course at a Partnership Institution. Following this a two year period of professional engagement takes place. During this period the person is supported by a mentor and a supervisor who assist with company training plans. These plans are checked and supported by an RICS training adviser. The candidate then presents themselves to the RICS for an Assessment of Professional Competence (APC). If successful the candidate will be awarded Professional Chartered Status and will be able to use the letters MRICS after their name. Following further experience with clear evidence of a contribution to the profession Fellowship can be applied for allowing the letters FRICS to be used after their name. (RICS, 2010b)

The Chartered Surveyor belongs to one nominated Faculty recently renamed as a Professional Group (normally the one that he/she qualified in). However the Chartered Surveyor can join four of these groupings as part of membership. The RICS sees itself a learned institution. With learning in mid post qualification the surveyor is expected to undertake Life Long Learning (LLL) also known as Continuing Professional Development (CPD). The surveyor sets learning objectives and must keep a learning log which may be audited at random. A major events programme run by the RICS and its regions supports this learning. This is another area where FIG and the RICS could develop more synergy as both organisations are 'learned societies'.

The RICS has a quality assurance system for 'knowledge' that is based in its professional groups of which there are 17. Overseeing this is a professional standards committee and associated staff. The development of standards for education is overseen by an education and training committee and group of staff dedicated to working with RICS members and Universities/Higher Education providers. The RICS sets threshold agreements with the Universities with standards set for: entry, employment, research and innovation. A partnership is developed between the University and the RICS with annual partnership meetings scheduled. As part of the quality assurance process the RICS insists that courses have two examiners one academic and one practitioner (some smaller courses only require one).

Providing a service in 146 countries the RICS provides standards with a global application imp: for example real estate agency and brokerage; valuation in the form of the RICS Red book – Global edition, (also specific standards at a regional level that includes standards for both India and Australia). Supporting this is a network of Continuing Professional Development courses run by RICS events.

As can be seen in England/UK the quality assurance system for training surveyors is very complicated with a ladder of agencies and systems involved taking the trainee surveyor through a route from school to college to university to professional training to qualification and finally to professional practice. This ladder of quality assurance can vary tremendously from country to country (Keller & Hofmann, 2002).

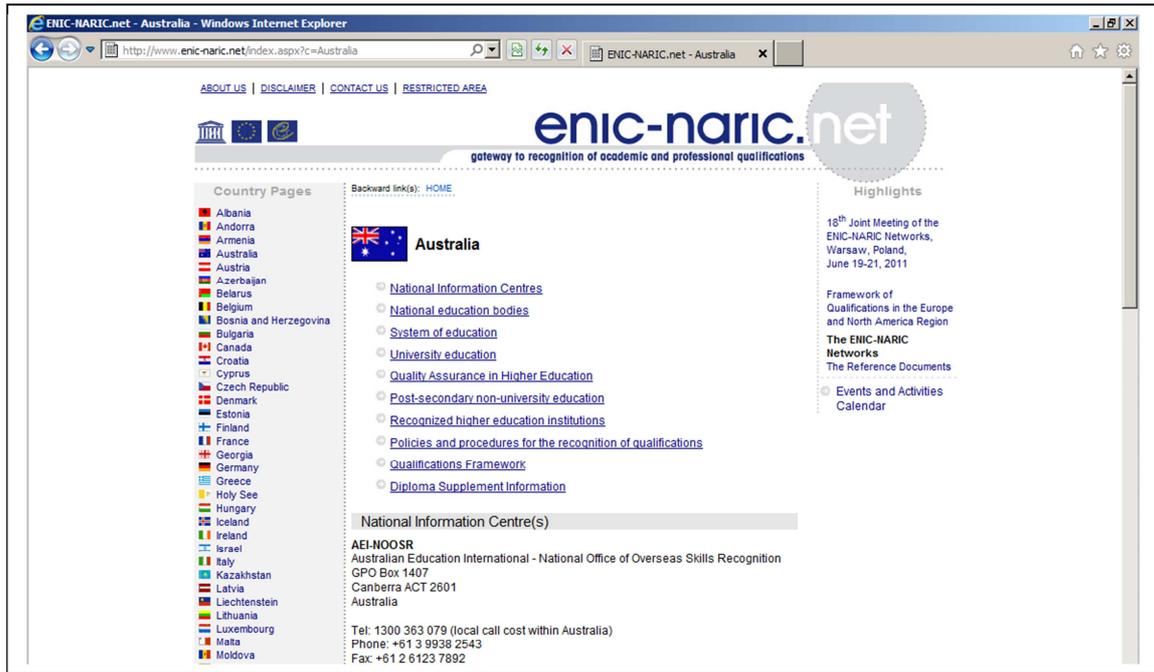
## **6 EUROPEAN NETWORKS**

Different practice and standards in education in Europe led to the creation of National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARIC) which is a network created in 1984 by the European Union (European Network of Information Centres & National Academic Recognition Information Centres [ENIC-NAIRC], 2011). Its aim is to promote the mobility of students between higher education institutions. Member countries have centres and this provides an information exchange to inform on types of qualifications, stages levels and can be used to provide comparables. In terms of benchmarking standards the Council of Europe and UNESCO have created the European Network of National information Centres on academic recognition and mobility the ENIC network.

To help these two organisations in their operational roles the European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES have created a web site with up-to-date information being maintained by member countries/organisations (ENIC-NAIRC, 2012a). This website is central to the communication of information containing information on the following at national level:

- National Information Centre
- National Education Bodies
- System of Education
- University Education
- Quality Assurance
- Post-secondary Non-University Education
- Recognised Higher Education Institutions
- Policies and Procedures for the Recognition of Foreign Qualification
- Qualifications Framework
- Diploma Supplement Information

An example of the NARIC web site illustrating Australia follows.



Source: ENIC-NARIC, 2012b

## 7 LICENCES AND MUTUAL AGREEMENTS

The NARIC system helps an understanding or harmonisation of standards but there is a further quality assurance issue and that is the need for licenses to provide certain activities and also the role of professional institutions. Post training a qualified Surveyor in some countries will require a licence to undertake certain activities and in other countries they will not. In the UK a licence is not required to practice as a Land Surveyor for example but in other for example in Australia a license is required. This brings into effect another level of quality assurance

FIG has been investigating mobility of labour and educational/training standards for some time. A task force on mutual recognition and qualifications has been created by FIG and has reported back (Enemark, 1999). The terms of reference were to: investigate existing regional agreements; develop guidelines for assuring competence; develop guidelines for establishing agreements and develop a concept and a framework for the implementation of threshold standards.

This task force was led by Prof. Stig Enemark who was until recently the President of FIG. Under his Presidency Prof. Stig Enemark developed a theme of Building the Capacity from 2007-2010 and this had the impact of improving co-operation between member institutions. Liberalising market services was a key objective and this led to the publication of FIG Publication No 27. (Enemark & Plimmer, 2002) There are already regional agreements between member institutions that have built on the mutual recognition work of FIG, such as the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Services (AFAS) (Teo, 2004) which came into force on the 19<sup>th</sup> February 2008. To encourage mutual recognition FIG has developed a website that

illustrates the basis of recognition (Fédération Internationale des Géomètres [FIG], 2011).

Clearly FIG recognises the importance of mobility of labour and is promoting this through: encouraging communication; developing a methodology with its members; supporting professional member organisations; working with external organisations such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The WTO has formulated an international agreement, the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) which commenced in January 1995 (Keller & Hofmann, 2002). The formulation of International agreements by FIG is a hugely complex task as there are already many powerful regional agreements in such organisations as the European Union (EU) and the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) to name just two.

FIG Publication No 27 (Enemark & Plimmer, 2002) has provided a review of five regional case studies but regional level analyses can often be difficult when member institutions are also global institutions in their own right operating in areas of many recognition frameworks. As this publication points out a key to understanding some of these complex issues is understanding how professional surveyors qualify and how professional competence is assessed. At this point perhaps there is a conflict regarding the definition of surveyors as the term can mean different things in different countries. Mutual recognition despite these complexities is a concept worth progressing for FIG but it is difficult to develop a set of common standards. This is something that other professions, particularly Medicine, are also grappling with as professional competence is a key global issue. This issue may eventually be resolved by legislation, agreements or possibly just market forces.

## **8 SUGGESTIONS FOR FIG**

The complexities of quality assurance schemes across the world have by many institutions been supplemented by the need to qualify/obtain government licences. To improve mobility across borders the EC promotes an organisation known as NARIC. FIG has conducted a considerable investigation into mutual agreements but inevitably these can only go so far as there is a restriction placed by national quality standards and quality assurance schemes. The European system set up by NARIC perhaps offers an opportunity. Its database of qualifications has become global. A FIG database could be developed in conjunction with other Global institutions such as the RICS in parallel to NARICS to provide information on:

- National Information Centres – key contacts
- National Education Bodies
- System of Education/ Qualifications Framework
- University Education
- Quality Assurance Institutions
- Post-secondary Non-University Education
- Recognised Higher Education Institutions
- Policies and Procedures for the Recognition of Foreign Qualification
- Criteria for practicing as a Surveyor
- Professional standards for practice

Mutual Agreements  
Licences  
Continuing Professional Development requirements

The development of such a database would enable individual surveyors to conduct a skills gap analysis if they wish to practice in another country. It would give them an information source to find help to remedy their skills shortage which would in turn improve the mobility of labour across national boundaries.

## 9 CONCLUSION

As an international organisation FIG perhaps supported by the RICs is well placed to develop a web site explaining to Surveyors the quality assurance needs and demands of different countries. This could build on the NARIC system. If developed this will promote a better understanding of quality assurance systems across national boundaries but also have the advantage of promoting mobility of labour.

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## **BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES**

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Tim's recent research activities include: coastal zone management, shipping management, maritime crime and coastal security, property management and development, waterfront development.

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