ANNUAL REPORT 2013

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European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) aisbl/ivzw

Lifelong Learning Programme

//// ANNUAL REPORT 2013

//// Foreword

Dear members, dear partners,

It is with great pleasure that we present you the EQAR Annual Report 2013, following an exciting and busy year.

Having been founded in March 2008, EQAR had its fifth anniversary in 2013. This was marked by a special reception, organised in conjunction with EQAR's General Assembly and the Bologna Follow-Up Group meeting in March. We have been particularly pleased for congratulations by the first Chair of the EQAR Register Committee, Mr Justice Bryan McMahon.

During the year, four quality assurance agencies were newly admitted to the Register, including agencies from three countries with no agencies on the Register before: Estonia, Slovenia and the United Kingdom.

Since the beginning of 2013, EQAR has published all decisions by the Register Committee on applications for inclusion on the Register as well as on registered agencies. This new policy has been implemented through a revision of the EQAR Procedures for Applications and implements one of the recommendations made in the external evaluation of EQAR in 2011.

The launch of the project "Recognising International Quality Assurance Activity" (RIQAA) was an important milestone for EQAR. The project, lasting until the autumn of 2014, will provide an inventory of national frameworks for cross-border quality assurance in Europe and an analysis of quality assurance agencies' and higher education institutions' experiences in cross-border audit, accreditation and evaluation.

Last but not least, the ongoing revision of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) has been an important topic for EQAR throughout the year, to which EQAR has contributed actively as part of the Steering Group.

We wish to thank all members and partners for the wonderful cooperation during the last year, and look forward to continue working together towards a coherent quality assurance framework for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

Maria Kelo
President, Executive Board

Eric Froment
Chair, Register Committee

//// 1. Report of the Register Committee

The EQAR Register Committee independently considers and decides upon applications by quality assurance agencies for inclusion on the Register. In doing so, the Register Committee has been taking into consideration the strategic goals of EQAR, set out in the Strategic Plan 2013-2017 adopted by the General Assembly.

1.1 Decisions on Inclusion, Provisional Registration and Renewal

This section of the Annual Report relates to the work of the EQAR Register Committee; it provides an overview of the two application rounds in 2013, and observations resulting from them.

The Register Committee has continued to use its established process, including two main rapporteurs and a third rapporteur, assigned from amongst Committee members, to assess applications as preparation for decision-making.

For a full description of the process used to consider applications for inclusion on the Register please refer to the Guide for Applicants (http://www.eqar.eu/application.html) and the EQAR Self-Evaluation Report (March 2011), available at: http://www.eqar.eu/publications/reports.html

The Register Committee considered and approved four applications for inclusion on the Register (ECCE until 30/6/15, EKKA until 31/3/18, SQAA until 31/7/18, QAA UK until 31/7/18 – see Annex 6 for details). Registration was renewed for one quality assurance agency (ANECA, until 30/11/17).

At the end of 2013, the Register included 31 quality assurance from 15 European countries, including three countries from which no agencies had been on the Register before: Estonia, Slovenia and the United Kingdom.

EQAR received one application for provisional registration, under the Merger Policy adopted in 2012: the Quality Assurance Unit of the Flemish Council of Universities and University Colleges (VLUHR QAU) was established as a result of a merger of the quality assurance units of VLHORA and VLIR (both registered before the merger). The Register Committee granted VLUHR QAU provisional registration until 31/12/2014. By that time, the new VLUHR QAU will need to undergo an external review against the ESG and, on that basis, apply for normal registration.

Further information:
https://eqar.eu/register/map.html
https://eqar.eu/publications/decisions.html

1.2 Communication with Applicants and Registered Agencies

**Revised Procedures and
Guide for Applicants**

The revised EQAR Procedures for Applications (see Annual Report 2012 for details) were published and became operative in January 2013. Together with the revised Procedures, an update version of the Guide for Applicants (version 3.0) was published.

The main changes introduced through the revision are:

/ the publication of the Register Committee's decisions (see below);

/ a process has been established to confirm eligibility of a planned external review in advance of an application, or to confirm whether a potential applicant is eligible in terms of the type of its activities;

/ the rules for renewal have been clarified and flexibility has been increased.

■ Governmental Member countries where registered agencies are based
■ Other countries where registered agencies are based
■ Governmental Member countries without registered agency
Map: Registered Agencies and Governmental Members
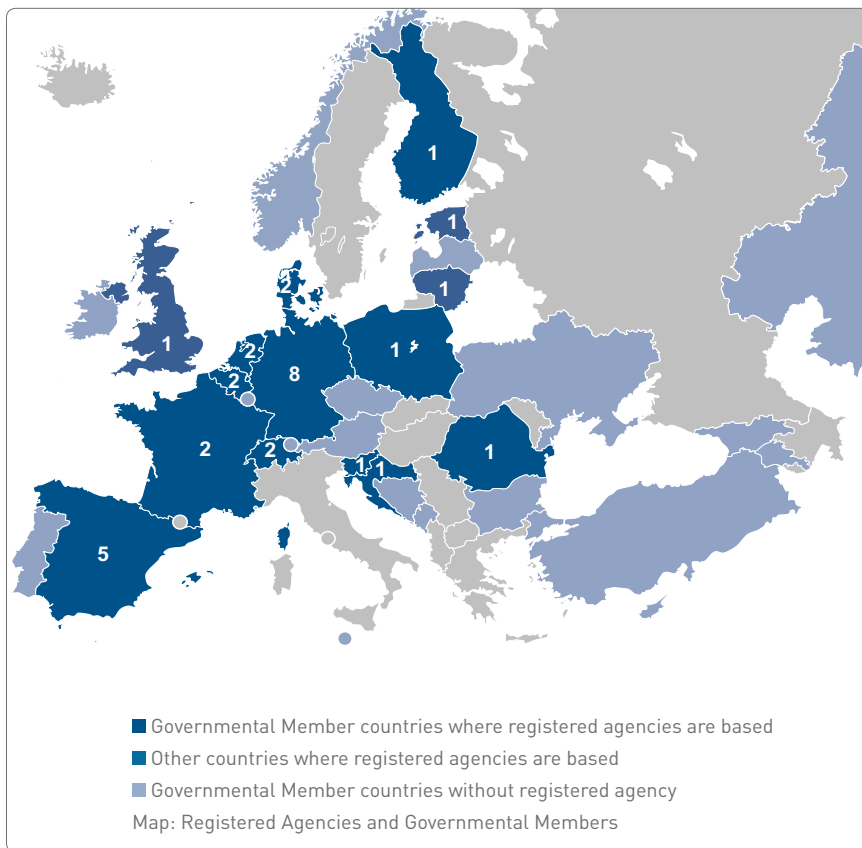
Further information:

https://eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/eqar/information/T_130131_MainChanges_RevisedProcedures.pdf

**External Reviews and
Application Process**

Thus far, one applicant quality assurance agency has made use of the new process to confirm eligibility of the planned external review process. In addition, a few applicants and review coordinators have sought informal advice when preparing the external review of the applicant.

In order to facilitate planning for applicants and review coordinators alike, EQAR has established two fixed deadlines for applications in each calendar year, 15 March and 15 September. This will enable long-term planning among agencies and coordinators, while the Register Committee will be planning its own sessions accordingly.

Table 1: Overview Applications			
	2013	2008 – 2012	Total
A Initial Applications	4	39	43
B Approved	4	32	36
C Withdrawn	0	4	4
D Rejected	0	3	3
E Renewal Applications (every 5 years)	1	7	8
F Approved	1	7	8
G Provisional registration (Merger Policy)	1	0	1
H Approved	1	0	1
I Registration expired[1] [of B]	3	4 (- 1[2])	6
J Registered as of 31/12/2013 [B + H - I]			31
K General / Sectoral[3]			26 / 5
L Operating in one / multiple countries			18 / 13

1. See http://www.eqar.eu/register/former-entries.html

2. Registration expired in 2012 but was renewed in 2013.

3. "Sectoral" refers to agencies that primarily review institutions or study

programmes within one or a few academic disciplines or professional fields.

Due to many European quality assurance agencies simultaneously seeking registration on EQAR as well as membership of ENQA, ENQA remains the most frequently used coordinator of external reviews.

A continuous dialogue between ENQA and EQAR has been maintained at various levels in order to facilitate the use of ENQA-coordinated reviews for agencies' applications for inclusion (or renewal of inclusion) on EQAR. In a meeting in June 2013, a number of important questions relating to these external reviews and their use by EQAR were addressed and clarified.

Addressing Flagged Issues in Renewal

In most cases where agencies were admitted to the Register (or had their registration renewed), the Register Committee identified some areas in which it considered that compliance with the ESG was less obvious or would warrant particular attention in the future. Such issues were "flagged" for future attention.

Table 2 provides an overview of the number of times issues relating to a particular standard were flagged in the applications which were decided upon in 2013. Full details are available as part of the Register Committee's decisions that are publicly available (see below).

It should be noted that there are differences in the types and levels of concern around ESG compliance in cases where issues were flagged for attention. The figures, therefore, only provide a general indication of the areas of concern.

The Register Committee also provided clarification as to how these flagged issues should be addressed by agencies when undergoing the next external review against the ESG for renewal of its registration.

Registered agencies are expected to address flagged issues in their Self-Evaluation Report. Agencies should also convey to the review coordinator and panel the need to address these issues in the external review report. If the flagged issues are not addressed, rapporteurs will normally request additional information from the agency or the review panel, which may delay the process.

Due to the differences in nature of flagged issues, each case is judged on its own merits, taking into account whether and how flagged issues were addressed.

Table 2: Flagged Issues

ESG	Flagged	ESG	Flagged
2.1 Use of Part 1	1	3.1 Use of Part 2	
2.2 Development of Processes		3.2 Official Status	
2.3 Criteria for Decisions	1	3.3 Activities	
2.4 Processes Fit for Purpose		3.4 Resources	
2.5 Reporting	1	3.5 Mission Statement	
2.6 Follow-Up Procedures		3.6 Independence	2
2.7 Periodic Reviews		3.7 External QA Procedures	2 [A]
2.8 System-wide Analyses	1	3.8 Accountability Procedures	

Where several issues related to the same standard were flagged for one agency, this is counted only once. Where a flag can be attributed to two standards, it is accounted for in relation to the standard that addresses the issue most specifically or directly.

[A] Only flags related to issues that are not addressed more specifically in part 2; flags under 3.7 relate to students on expert groups, the use of site visits and appeals procedures.

Substantive Changes in Registered Agencies

The Register Committee considered Substantive Change Reports from a number of registered quality assurance agencies.

It seems that the specific information document and the Substantive Change Report Template (published in 2012) have been a helpful resource for registered quality assurance agencies, and that these measures have increased awareness about the need to report substantive changes.

1.3 Enhancing Transparency

Publication of a Document on Practices and Interpretations

The Register Committee has produced and published a document (see Annex 7) that summarises its acquired practices in considering compliance with the ESG and the principal interpretations it has made with regard to the standards.

The document is based on what used to be an internal "summary of precedents" which the Register Committee has been using to support consistency in its decision-making.

The public document aims to increase transparency in the work of the Register

Committee, to help demonstrate consistency in its decision-making and to facilitate a better understanding of the Committee's public decisions. It is also intended to to aid external review panels in understanding how the Committee has interpreted the ESG and used external review reports.

Further information:

https://eqar.eu/publications/decisions.html

Register Committee, May 2013, Berlin

Publication of all Decisions

The revised EQAR Procedures make provision for the publication of all decisions on eligible applications by quality assurance agencies for inclusion on the Register, as well as for all decisionson registered agencies.

This implements a recommendation by the international expert panel that carried out the external evaluation of EQAR in 2011. All decisions made by the Register Committee as from 2013 have been published in a chronological list of decisions.

The objective of publishing decisions is to enhance transparency in the work and operations of the Register Committee, and to prevent rumours about decisions. The objective is not to establish a "black list" and, therefore, EQAR does not publish these decisions in the form of a list of rejected agencies.

Decisions are only published once they are final, i.e. when no (further) appeal is possible against them. The decisions are published in full after having been sent to the agency concerned.

Further information:

https://eqar.eu/publications/decisions.html

Register Committee, October 2013, Gent

1.4 Contributing to the Revision of the ESG

EQAR is an active partner in the revision of the ESG and is part of the responsible Steering Group, which includes representatives of ENQA, ESU, EUA, EURASHE, BUSINESSEUROPE, Education International and EQAR.

The Register Committee's Subcommittee on the revision has continuously contributed to the revision process through preparing EQAR's contributions and input to the Steering Group's deliberations.

After a public consultation on the context, scope, purposes and principles of the ESG (spring of 2013), the Steering Group has been working on the revised standards and guidelines throughout the year.

In August 2013, the Register Committee convened for a workshop meeting dedicated to discussing the ongoing ESG revision and preparing its feedback.

A first draft of the initial proposal has been presented to the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) meeting in October 2013. Based on the feedback of the BFUG at its meeting and the written comments provided by numerous countries and organisations the Steering Group will finalise its proposal for the April 2014 BFUG meeting.

In 2014, the Register Committee will consider transitional arrangements for shifting to the revised version of ESG as criteria for inclusion on the Register, as well as for renewal of registration.

//// 2. Policy Developments in the EHEA

EQAR has been cooperating during 2013 with the E4 group, Education International and BUSINESSEUROPE in the revision of the European Standards and Guidelines (see above). Furthermore, EQAR has been active in the work of relevant sub-structures of the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG), established after the Nicosia BFUG meeting (August 2012) for the period until the 2015 ministerial conference in Yerevan, Armenia:

/ Working Group on the Bologna Process Implementation
(represented by Melinda Szabo, Project Officer)
/ Working Group on 'Structural Reforms'
(represented by Colin Tück, Director)
/ Working Group on Mobility and Internationalisation
(represented by Eric Froment, Chair of the Register Committee)

2.1 Recognition of International Quality Assurance Activity (RIQAA Project)

Following up on the 2012 Bologna Ministerial Commitment[1] EQAR has been collecting and analysing information on the extent to which different EHEA countries allow (foreign) EQAR-registered agencies to operate[2] within their jurisdiction. This work is part of the project Recognising International Quality Assurance Activity (RIQAA), which is co-funded by the European Union's Lifelong Learning Programme (October 2013 - September 2014).

The activities carried out under the project will allow to gain further insight into the legal framework on the use of EQAR-registered QAAs in EHEA countries (i.e. desk research and consultation with stakeholders) and on the rationale behind the internationalisation of external quality assurance activities (i.e. survey with QAAs and case-study interviews with 12 HEIs). The findings of the project will be discussed in autumn 2014 with government representatives, QA agencies, HEIs, students, policy makers and other HE stakeholders during a Bologna Policy Seminar.

Legal frameworks

The preliminary results of the project show that there are currently 11 EHEA countries (Table 3) that allow their higher education institutions to be reviewed by any EQAR-registered QA agency to discharge their obligatory external quality assurance obligations. Some additional countries (see Map 2 and italics in Table 4) use different requirements than EQAR registration for allowing QA agencies from other countries to operate.

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1 In their Bucharest Communiqué (2012), ministers agreed to "allow EQAR register agencies to perform their activities across the EHEA, while complying with national requirements" and, in particular, "to recognise quality assurance decisions of EQAR-registered agencies on joint and double degree programmes".

2 "Operate" herein always refers to higher education institutions being able to be reviewed by the foreign QA agency to discharge their obligatory external quality assurance obligations. Presumably, in no country higher education institutions will be forbidden to undergo voluntary reviews in addition to the legally required audit, accreditation or evaluation.

Albania	All Albanian higher education institutions are able to choose for their external evaluation an EQAR-registered QA agency. The external evaluation conducted by these agencies should be done in accordance with standards and procedures adopted by the Ministry of Education and Science. The activity of these agencies in the Republic of Albania may be temporary or they may become permanent. When they exert a permanent activity, the agency must acquire legal personality according to the Albanian law. The final decision on the institutional/programme accreditation is taken by the Ministry of Education and Science.
Armenia	Armenian higher education institutions can choose for their institutional and programme accreditation an EQAR-registered agency, as an alternative to the national agency (ANQA). The accreditation carried out by an EQAR registered agency is automatically recognised.
Austria	Public universities in Austria have their internal quality assurance system certified in a periodic external audit. For these audits, universities are free to choose any EQAR-registered agency. Universities of applied sciences will also benefit from this option once they have been accredited by the Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance (AQA) for two six-year terms.
Belgium: Flemish Community	Higher education institutions in the Flemish Community of Belgium can choose to have their accreditation review carried out by foreign EQAR-registered agencies. This review will be the basis for accreditation of the study programmes by the NVAO. All EQAR-registered agencies are automatically entitled to carry out the assessment reviews. While they do not have to be included on a special list or register, agencies will have to agree the Terms of Reference with NVAO.

Bulgaria	Bulgarian higher education institutions (HEIs) have the possibility to commission a foreign EQAR-registered QA agency for their compulsory accreditation, at programme as well as institutional level. The foreign agency will have to use the same criteria and mark-based system as the national agency, NEAA.
Denmark	Automatic recognition of accreditation by EQAR-registered agencies for joint degrees and joint programmes. Danish institutions may only issue Danish diplomas for programmes offered abroad if these programmes are accredited either by the national Danish Accreditation Agency or an "internationally recognised" agency. If an agency is registered on EQAR, it is automatically considered "internationally recognised"; otherwise, it has to prove this in an individual procedure to the Danish authorities.
Germany	For their periodic accreditation of their study programmes or quality assurance systems German higher education institutions (HEIs) can choose from amongst QA agencies that are accredited by the German Accreditation Council, a national regulatory body. These agencies can also ratify individual accreditation decisions by other agencies on joint programmes between a German and foreign institution. This is subject to the agency being registered on EQAR or a full member of ENQA.
Kazakhstan	Institutions are subject to periodic institutional and programme accreditation. They can have their programmes accredited by any quality assurance agency listed on the Kazakh national register of accreditation bodies. Quality assurance agencies from other countries in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) can be included on the national register of agencies subject to the condition that they are EQAR-registered. Moreover, both Kazakh and foreign agencies on the national register will not need to undergo a review by

	the Kazakh authorities if they are registered on EQAR, since registration guarantees that agencies periodically re-evidence their substantial compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) through an external review every five years.
Liechtenstein	Liechtenstein legislation requires the higher education institution to seek accreditation by any EQAR-registered agency. The country has decided not to establish an own national agency.
Lithuania	Lithuanian HEIs are subject to regular accreditation at both institutional and programme level. For programme accreditation, HEIs can opt for an external review conducted by any EQAR-registered QA agency. The actual accreditation decision, however, remains the responsibility of the national QA agency, SKVC.
Poland	Polish HEIs may request foreign EQAR-registered QA agencies to conduct an external accreditation review, whereas the accreditation decision is taken by the Polish Accreditation Commission (PKA, the national agency). HEIs are further required to be reviewed by an EQAR-registered agency in order to apply for the right to offer doctorate degrees. Foreign higher education institutions (HEIs) that have been accredited by any EQAR-registered agency have the right to establish branch HEIs or departments in Polish.
Romania	HEIs in Romania are subject to (initial) accreditation by the national QA agency, ARACIS, or any other EQAR registered agency. Higher education institutions can choose for their programme accreditation and periodic external evaluations the national agency or any other EQAR listed agency. The external review body must comply with the national regulation and other international field related standards.

Legend:
- Countries recognising all EQAR-registered agencies as part of the national requirements for external QA[3]
- Countries recognising foreign agencies as part of the national requirements for external QA
- Countries not open to external QA evaluation by a foreign QA agency
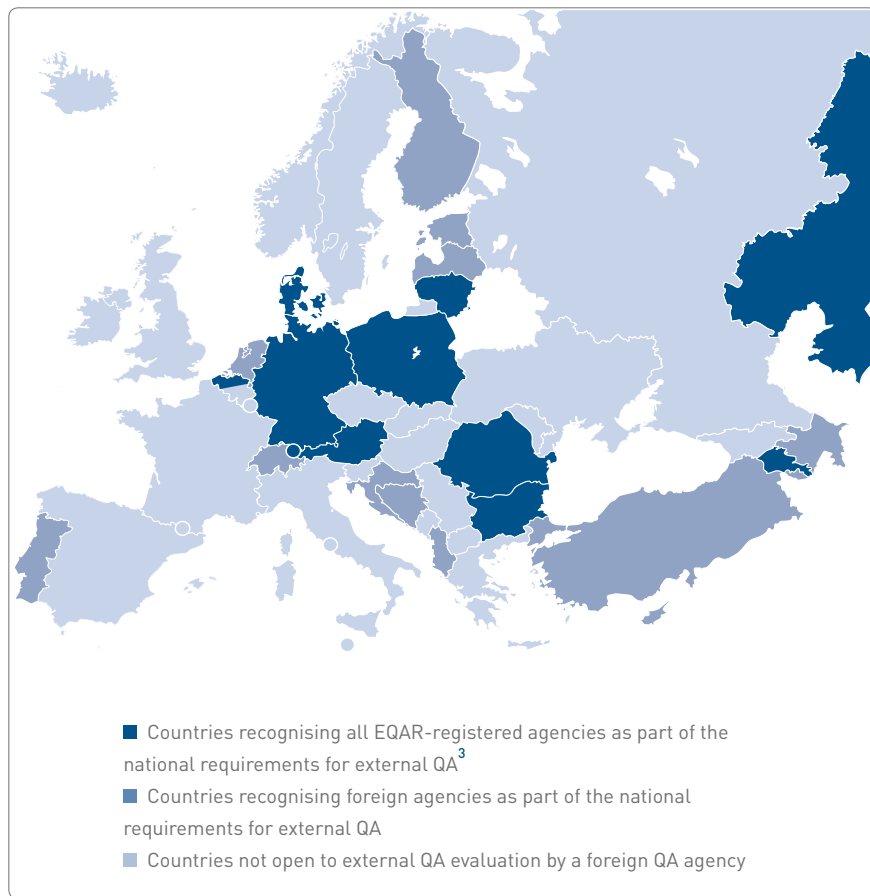
The existing legal frameworks differ in detail: some countries allow all HEIs to choose any EQAR-registered agency for all types of external quality assurance obligations they are subject to. In other countries, the possibility to choose a quality assurance agency is limited to a certain group of HEI's (e.g. full universities in Austria) or to certain types of external QA (e.g. only for programme accreditation, but not for institutional accreditation; or not for initial accreditation), see (B) in Table 4. Some countries only recognise reviews by foreign QA agencies for joint degrees, transnational provision or other, specific circumstances (C). Even for the specific case of joint programmes (leading to joint, double or multiple degrees) only a limited amount of countries allows them to be quality assured in a single procedure by one EQAR-registered agency, the result of which is recognised in all countries involved.

3 Higher education institutions are able to be reviewed (for an audit, accreditation or evaluation) by a QA agency to discharge their obligatory external quality assurance obligations.

Table 4: Recognition of QA agencis' decisions and results		
	(1) Outcome/decision directly recognised	(2) Final decision by national QA body
(A) All HEI's, all external QA	LI, RO, FI	AL, AM, BE-fl, KAZ EE, ME, NL
(B) Some HEI's or some types of external QA only	AT, CH	LT, PT
(C) Only joint degrees or specific circumstances	DK, PL	DE

Notes:

/ Where no clear information about the existing QA framework, countries were not introduced in the table.

/ Countries in light letters do not refer to EQAR registration for allowing QA agencies from other countries to operate.

Considering the formal outcome or (accreditation) decision of the QA review in some cases the role of the foreign QA agency might be limited to carrying out the review and producing a report (1), while in other cases the final decision lies with a national QA body (2).

Further information:

https://eqar.eu/projects/map.html

Challenges

Inquiring on the main challenges of cross-border external reviews, quality assurance agencies[4] have pointed to language barriers, the availability of regulatory documents and standards in English; becoming acquainted with the national context and specifics of the "target" country; difficulties as to what set of standards to apply; and different expectations in terms of content and style of reports, especially where another agency needs to make a decision on their basis.

4 Based on a survey of April 2013, by EQAR in cooperation with Bertelsmann Stiftung, on publications by QA agencies and on statements in various seminars.

At present, there is only limited quantitative data on the number of agencies operating in these countries, and on the number of institutions or programmes having been reviewed.

The RIQAA project is expected to provide a better overview of cross-border quality assurance practice in Europe and more insight into challenges and opportunities.

Seminar on Austria's New Legal Framework, September 2013, Brussels

2.2 Seminars Co-organised by EQAR

Seminar with Austrian Representation

On 19 September 2013, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science and Research, in cooperation with EQAR, organised a morning conference on Austria's new legal framework for external quality assurance and first experiences made by the University of Graz. Austria undertook a major legal reform of its quality assurance sector by merging several QA institutions and giving universities the possibility to choose any EQAR-registered QA agency for their regular audit. The event took place at the Permanent Representation of Austria to the European Union (Brussels).

Peer-Learning Seminar on Quality Assurance, National Qualifications Frameworks and Recognition

The Ministry of Science, Education and Sports of the Republic of Croatia and EQAR jointly organised an international seminar on the role of national qualifications frameworks and quality assurance in recognition, which took place in Trakošćan on 11 December 2013. The seminar was an activity under the peer learning and peer review initiative proposed within the BFUG Work Plan 2012-2015, as well as in EQAR's Strategic Plan 2013-2017.

The seminar, aimed to facilitate mutual learning and the exchange of good practice, addressed two main topics:
/ the strengths/opportunities of the different recognition systems (presented in case studies and participants' own country) at national, institutional and individual levels;
/ the challenges in recognition systems and procedures and the effective use of Bologna tools in recognition and cross-border quality assurance in higher education.

The positive effects of the EHEA instruments (ESG, NQF, ECTS, DS, EQAR) both in facilitating the recognition of qualifications and in establishing an efficient framework for enabling the work of foreign EQAR-registered agencies, were highlighted in the seminar's conclusions.

Further information:
https://eqar.eu/publications/presentations.html

Peer-Learning Seminar, December 2013

2.3 European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes

EQAR has contributed to the work of an ad-hoc expert group, commissioned by the BFUG, that is developing a policy proposal for a European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.

The proposed European Approach will follow up ministers' commitment to "recognise quality assurance decisions of EQAR-registered agencies on joint and double degree programmes" (Bucharest Communiqué, 2012) and aim to lift some of the obstacles to the development and implementation of joint programmes in the EHEA.

ASEM Seminar on Quality Assurance, Trust and Recognition, September 2013, Brussels

Initial drafts of the proposal have been discussed in the BFUG working groups on Structural Reforms and Mobility/Internationalisation. A draft proposal will be presented to the BFUG and discussed further during 2014.

//// 3. Communication and Public Relations

3.1 Publications

The EQAR Annual Report 2012, which included the Report by the Register Committee, as well as the Strategic Plan 2013-2017 adopted by the last EQAR General Assembly,

was published on-line only. It is available on the website and has been announced in one of the newsletters.

In 2013 EQAR issued four newsletters (reaching ca. 500 recipients), providing information about new agencies on the Register, relevant policy developments with regard to quality assurance, meetings and upcoming events as well as new governmental members.

A flyer about the project "Recognising International Quality Assurance Activity in the European Higher Education Area" (RIQAA) was distributed at the European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF) held in Gothenburg as well as at subsequent events.

Further information:
https://eqar.eu/registration/newsletter.html

3.2 Social Media

EQAR maintained an active presence on various social media, including Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. Over 440 peopled viewed the Facebook post on the Seminar "the role of NQF's and QA in recognition" that was held in Croatia together with the Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports. EQAR had more than 130 Twitter followers by the end of 2013.

Further information:

Members' Dialogue, October 2013, Gent

3.3 Website

Notwithstanding social media, the website still remains EQAR's main communication tool to address its target audiences. Apart from the list of registered agencies – EQAR's raison d'être - it includes general information on EQAR, guidance for applicant quality assurance agencies and other statements and publications. As of 2013, full decisions of the Register Committee are publicly available on the website (see also 1.2).

The navigation structure of the website was improved in 2013 to enhance accessibility for different users. The Register of agencies itself was made accessible through an interactive map, in addition to the existing list view.

In the context of revising the general information on EQAR and its role in the EHEA, an agreed description of the roles of the E4 organisations, EQAR's founders, within and vis-à-vis EQAR has been published. The text is the result of a joint discussion of the E4 organisations (ENQA, ESU, EUA, EURASHE) and EQAR on the different organisations' roles and responsibilities for developing and maintaining the EHEA framework for quality assurance.

The number of visits on the EQAR website has continued to steadily, with an average of 15 000 visits per months in 2013 (2012: ca 8 000, 2011: ca 7 000, 2010: ca 6 000, 2009: ca 5 000).

Further information:
https://eqar.eu/about/e4-group.html

3.4 Representation and Relations with Partners

EQAR was represented in all major conferences and seminars concerned with quality assurance of higher education in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), including:
/ CHEA Annual Conference
/ Irish Presidency Conference on QA in Qualifications Frameworks
/ ENIC-NARIC annual joint meeting
/ JOQAR Dissemination Conference
/ ASEM Seminar on Quality Assurance, Trust and Recognition
/ PICQA Conference
/ EURASHE Annual Conference
/ ENQA General Assembly
/ European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF)
/ Alfa Puentes Bi-regional University Association Conference

EQAR further contributed to several conferences organised by national ministries, quality assurance agencies and stakeholder organisations.

In doing so, EQAR was able to provide information on its work to potential applicants and users as well as to the higher education community in general.

Various European and non-European quality assurance agencies and stakeholder organisation visited the EQAR offices to learn more about EQAR's work.

Further information:
https://eqar.eu/publications/presentations.html

3.5 Fifth Anniversary

In connection with the 7th EQAR General Assembly, on 13 March 2013, EQAR celebrated the fifth anniversary of its founding, on 4 March 2008. After the General Assembly, members, partners, BFUG members and many of the people who supported EQAR from its inception gathered for a reception at Dublin Castle.

Lesley Wilson, President of the Executive Board of EQAR then and also the first one to hold that position after the founding, gave a speech illustrating the milestones in EQAR's development. The first Chair of the Register Committee, Mr Justice Bryan McMahon, addressed guests in a special congratulatory speech, followed by Christy Mannion (Irish Department of Education and Skills) and Frank Petrikowski (European Commission).

3.6 Members' Dialogue

EQAR's third Members' Dialogue was held in Ghent on 17/18 October 2013, hosted by the Flemish Department of Education and Training.

Approximately 55 representatives of EQAR governmental members, European stakeholder organisations and EQAR committee members gathered to discuss the latest policy developments in QA, accomplishments and further steps and activities towards realising EQAR's strategic goals.

Keynote speakers covered a variety of topics, including the European Commission's initiatives in Quality Assurance and a view on what Europe might learn from the debates on the future of accreditation in the USA. A case study of a cross-border quality audit was also presented from the perspective of both the audited university as well as the QA agency that performed the audit.

During the "Knowledge Café" participants gained insight into the frameworks and experiences of seven different countries that allow their higher education institutions to be accredited/evaluated/audited by foreign, EQAR-registered agencies.

The parallel sessions of the event were set out to address a number of specific topics related to the strategic goals and activities of EQAR's Strategic Plan: The conclusions from the analysis on the recognition of registered agencies were explored and discussed as well as the proposal for a European approach for assuring joint programmes accreditation. Participants also discussed how the ESG and EQAR could support automatic recognition and the implications following the adoption of the new EU Directive on professional recognition. During another session options for improving the provision of information on registered quality assurance agencies were discussed.

Further information:

http://www.eqar.eu/publications/presentations.html

//// 4. Organisation Development

The Czech Republic joined EQAR as Governmental Members in 2013. By the end of 2013, 31 EHEA governments were members of EQAR. All 47 countries that are part of the EHEA are eligible for governmental membership.

4.1 Staff

Melinda Szabo joined EQAR as Project Officer in March 2013. She is, among others, responsible for the Analysis on the recognition of EQAR-registered agencies (RIQAA project).

Annelies Traas moved back to Belgium in September 2013 and re-joined the Secretariat as staff member after having worked for EQAR on a consultancy base during the previous year.

The Secretariat now comprises 2,25 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff.

EQAR Fifth Anniversary Reception, March 2013, Dublin

4.2 Statutory Bodies

Since 1 April 2013, the Executive Board members have been assuming the following functions:

President:
/ Maria Kelo (ENQA)

Vice-President:
/ Stefan Delplace (EURASHE)

Vice-President:
/ Lesley Wilson (EUA)

Treasurer:
/ Allan Päll (ESU)

The General Assembly of 2013 approved the by-nomination of Andrea Blättler to replace Gertie De Fraeye as Register Committee member until the end of the mandate on 30 June 2014. The composition of all EQAR statutory bodies is included in Annex 5.

4.3 Finances

EQAR relies on a diversified funding base, including annual contributions from its governmental members (71%) and stakeholder members (7%), application and listing fees paid by registered quality assurance agencies (12%), as well as a project grant from the European Commission (7%).[5]

The financial year 2013 resulted in a minimal deficit of EUR 882,83.

EQAR General Assembly, March 2013, Dublin

Table 5: Balance Sheet			
Assets		**Liabilities and Equity**	
Fixed assets	**3 847,39**	**Own funds**	**110 799,73**
Guarantees	147,66	Profit/loss previous years	31 682,56
Office equipment	3 699,73	Result per 31/12/2013	- 882,83
Liquid assets	**216 376,62**	Reserves	80 000,00
Receivables up to 1 year	33 436,53	**Liabilities**	**109 424,28**
Cash	167 013,05	Payables up to 1 year	22 065,97
Adjustment accounts	15 927,04	Adjustment accounts	87 358,31
TOTAL	**220 224,01**	**TOTAL**	**220 224,01**

Table 6: Profit and Loss Account			
Income		**Expenditure**	
Membership fees	218 500,00	Meetings and projects	91 979,88
Agency fees	34 658,00	Office and administration	34 853,00
Project grant	19 916,84	Staff	127 786,19
Other income	8 731,28	Other costs	28 595,65
Operational income	**281 806,12**	**Operational expenditure**	**283 214,72**
Operational result	**- 1 408,60**		
Financial income	1 301,56	Financial costs and taxes	775,79
Total result	**- 882,83**		

//// Annex

1. Mission Statement

(from Strategic Plan 2013 – 2017, adopted by the
EQAR General Assembly of 13/3/2013)

I. Vision, Mission and Values

EQAR's vision is a coherent quality assurance framework for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in which higher education institutions have the freedom to turn to any EQAR-registered agency for their external quality assurance reviews, and in which qualifications are thus universally recognised .

Mission
EQAR's mission is to further the development of the European Higher Education Area by increasing the transparency of quality assurance, and thus enhancing trust and confidence in European higher education.

EQAR seeks to provide clear and reliable information on quality assurance provision in Europe, thus improving trust among agencies.

EQAR seeks to facilitate the mutual acceptance of quality assurance decisions and to improve trust among higher education institutions, thus promoting mobility and recognition.

EQAR seeks to reduce opportunities for "accreditation mills" to gain credibility in Europe, thus further enhancing the confidence of students, institutions, the labour market and society more generally in the quality of higher education provision in Europe. To achieve its mission EQAR, through its independent Register Committee, manages a register of quality assurance agencies operating in Europe that substantially comply with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG).

Values
EQAR recognises the diversity of approaches to external quality assurance and is therefore open to all agencies, whether operating at programme or institutional level, and whether providing accreditation, evaluation or audit services.

EQAR is committed to the principles on which the ESG are based: external quality assurance should recognise the central responsibility of higher education institutions for quality development and should be carried out by independent quality assurance

agencies in a transparent, objective and responsible manner, involving their stakeholders and leading to substantiated results based on well-defined procedures and criteria.

EQAR acts independently from other organisations and is committed to taking proportionate, consistent, fair and objective decisions.

EQAR makes transparent its mode of operation and its procedures while ensuring necessary confidentiality. EQAR is committed to continuously improving the quality of its work.

2. Overview of EQAR's Structure

The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) was founded in March 2008 to promote transparency, trust and international recognition in quality assurance of higher education. EQAR maintains a register of quality assurance agencies that have proven to comply substantially with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG).

The founding of EQAR as an independent international non-profit association concluded a long phase of conceptual and preparatory work by the E4 Group, consisting of ENQA, ESU, EUA and EURASHE.

The E4 Group drew up an operational model for a European register of quality assurance agencies in higher education in the run-up to the Bologna Process follow-up conference held in May 2007 in London. There, the ministers responsible for higher education in the 46 Bologna Process countries mandated the E4 organisations to set up a European register of quality assurance agencies.

EQAR's structure is based on the premise that the key stakeholders in higher education jointly bear the main responsibility to manage EQAR and to ensure its operation, as reflected in the mandate given to the E4 Group by ministers. At the same time, the structure recognises that European governments bear the responsibility for Europe's higher education systems as a whole and thus need to be involved in order to enhance overall accountability.

Thus, the structure features differentiated roles for governments and stakeholders, and several checks and balances (see Organisational Chart). European governments can become involved in the governance of the EQAR association as Governmental Members.

The **General Assembly (GA)**, comprised of all members, is the supreme decision-making body of EQAR. It decides on the budget, approves the account, elects the Executive Board and
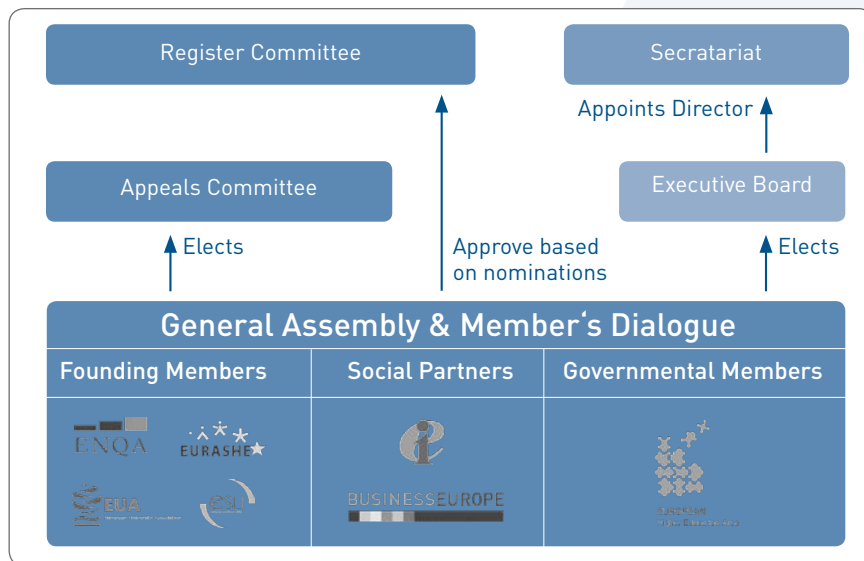
The **Executive Board** (EB) is in charge of the management of EQAR as an association, including administrative and financial matters and strategic coordination.

The Executive Board comprises of five members: one from each Founding Member and the Chair of the Register Committee as an ex officio member without voting rights.

The functions of President, two Vice-Presidents and Treasurer rotate annually amongst the Board's voting members.

The **Register Committee** has the exclusive responsibility to decide on applications for inclusion on the Register. It exercises this responsibility independently; its decisions do not require approval or ratification by another body.

The Register Committee comprises eleven members. Ten individuals with

Appeals Committee, approves the Register Committee and discusses any matters of major importance for the Association as a whole.

The European Commission, the Bologna Secretariat, the Council of Europe and UNESCO participate in its meetings as observers.

The voting system of the General Assembly ensures that most decisions require a majority of both the Governmental Members and the Non-Governmental Members (i.e., Founding and Social Partner Members).

expertise in quality assurance are nominated ENQA, ESU, EUA, EURASHE (2 nominees each), BUSINESSEUROPE and Education International (1 nominee each). The chair is elected by the nominated members and co-opted onto the Register Committee as its eleventh member.

The Register Committee members serve as experts acting in their individual capacity, and not as representatives of the nominating organisations. Nominees may not currently hold a representative function or be a staff member of the nominating organisation.

Five governments, nominated by the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG), participate in the Register Committee's meetings as observers.

Appeals against a decision of the Register Committee are considered by the Appeals Committee, comprising of three members and three deputies elected by the General Assembly for a mandate of four years. They may not serve on any other body of EQAR.

The **Secretariat** is in charge of the daily management and operation of EQAR. It supports all other bodies in their work, ensures the information exchange between different bodies and serves as contact point for external enquiries.

3. Code of Conduct

The Code of Conduct is based on EQAR's values as defined in the Mission Statement:
EQAR recognises the diversity of approaches to external quality assurance and is therefore open to all agencies, whether operating at programme or institutional level, whether providing accreditation, evaluation or audit services.

EQAR is committed to the principle on which the ESG are based: external quality assurance should recognise the central responsibility of higher education institutions for quality development and should be carried out by independent quality assurance agencies in a transparent, objective and responsible manner, involving their stakeholders and leading to substantiated results based on well-defined procedures and criteria.

EQAR acts independently from other organisations and is committed to taking proportionate, consistent, fair and objective decisions.

EQAR will make transparent its mode of operation and its procedures while ensuring necessary confidentiality. EQAR is committed to continuously improving the quality of its work.

All members of EQAR committees and staff commit to:

/ ensuring integrity in their work at all times;

/ promoting EQAR's values;

/ acting in a manner that supports the perception of EQAR as an independent organisation working to high professional standards;

/ honouring confidentiality of internal documents and information;

/ disclosing to EQAR any functions, memberships, contracts or other relationships maintained with QAAs or their affiliates;

/ disclosing to EQAR any other circumstances that constitute or may be perceived as a conflict of interest.

Members of the Executive Board also commit to:

/ when speaking in public, ensuring clarity as to whether speaking on behalf of EQAR or their own organisation.

Members of the Register Committee also commit to:

/ in matters related to quality assurance of higher education, not representing or acting on behalf of an organisation that nominates members of the Register Committee.

/ when speaking in public otherwise, ensuring clarity as to whether speaking on behalf of EQAR or their own organisation.

/ not serving on panels reviewing QAAs where these reviews may potentially be used to support an EQAR application.

Members of staff also commit to:

/ not accepting any functions, memberships, contracts or other relationships with a QAA, EQAR member or other organisation that could jeopardise the independence of EQAR in any way.

Concerns

Any third party (organisations as well as individuals) may address a concern as to whether a representative has acted in accordance with this Code of Conduct to EQAR.

Such concerns should be referred to the President of the Executive Board or the Director of the Secretariat, as appropriate. A concern should clearly specify the individual concerned and the occasion that caused the concern.

For concerns regarding the work of a registered agency, please refer to the Complaints Policy. If you are an applicant and have a concern regarding the decision on your application, please address the EQAR Secretariat.

4. List of EQAR members, as of 31/12/2013

Founding Members
/ ENQA, European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
/ ESU, European Students´ Union (formerly ESIB)
/ EUA, European University Association
/ EURASHE, European Association of Institutions in Higher Education

Social Partner Members
/ BUSINESSEUROPE
/ Education International

Governmental Members
/ Armenia Ministry of Education and Science
/ Austria Federal Ministry of Science and Research
/ Belgium (Flemish community) Flemish Department of Education and Training
/ Belgium (French community) Direction générale de l'Enseignement non obligatoire et de la Recherche scientifique
/ Bosnia and Herzegovina Ministry of Civil Affairs
/ Bulgaria Ministry of Education and Science
/ Croatia Ministry of Science Education and Sports

/ Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture
/ Czech Republic Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports – since 2013
/ Denmark Danish University and Property Agency / Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation
/ Estonia Ministry of Education and Research
/ France Ministry of Higher Education and Research
/ Georgia Ministry of Education and Science
/ Germany Federal Ministry of Education and Research / Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany
/ Ireland Department of Education and Science
/ Poland Ministry of Science and Higher Education
/ Kazakhstan Ministry of Education and Science
/ Latvia Ministry of Education and Science
/ Liechtenstein Office of Education
/ Luxembourg Ministry of Culture, Higher Education and Research
/ Malta Ministry of Education, Employment and the Family
/ Montenegro Ministry of Education and Sports
/ the Netherlands Ministry of Education, Culture and Science
/ Norway Ministry of Education and Research
/ Portugal Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education
/ Romania Ministry of Education, Research and Youth
/ Slovenia Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Technology

/ Spain Ministry of Education and Science
/ Switzerland State Secretariat for Education and Research
/ Turkey Council of Higher Education
/ Ukraine Ministry of Education and Science

5. Composition of EQAR bodies

Register Committee
Chair:
/ Eric Froment (Poitiers, France)
  former President, University of Lyon 2, France

Vice-Chair:
/ Lucien Bollaert (Kortrijk, Belgium)
  Member of the Executive Board, Accreditation Organisation of
  the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO)

Members:
/ Christoph Anz (München, Germany)
  Head of Education Policy Unit, BMW Group
/ Andrea Blättler (Lucerne, Switzerland)
  Undergraduate assistant at the political science department
  of the University of Lucerne – since April 2013

/ Gertie De Fraeye (Ghent, Belgium)
  Master student in law and student representative and vice-
  chair of the council for higher education in the Flemish Edu-
  cation Council – until March 2013
/ Henrik Toft Jensen (Roskilde, Denmark)
  Former rector, Roskilde University
/ Dáire Keogh (Dublin, Ireland)
  President, St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin City
  University
/ Dorte Kristoffersen (Melbourne, Australia)
  Commissioner, Tertiary Education Quality and Standards
  Agency (TEQSA)
/ Mindaugas Misiunas (Vilnius, Lithuania)
  Director, Kauno kolegija (University of Applied Sciences), Vilnius
  College of Higher Education
/ Júlio Pedrosa (Aveiro, Portugal)
  Senior Researcher, Ciceco – Centre for Research in Ceramics
  and Composite Materials
/ Anca Prisacariu (Bucharest, Romania)
  Academic Affairs Officer, Romanian National Union of
  Students (ANOSR)
/ Mala Singh (Umdloti, South Africa)
  Professor Extraordinaire in the Centre for Higher Education
  Research, Teaching and Learning at Rhodes University

Observers:

/ Austria

/ Belgium (Flemish Community)

/ France

/ Germany

/ Turkey

Executive Board

President:

/ Maria Kelo (Brussels, Belgium)
   Director, European Association for Quality Assurance in
   Higher Education (ENQA)
   (since April 2013, before: Vice-President)

Vice-Presidents:

/ Lesley Wilson (Brussels, Belgium)
   Secretary General, European University Association (EUA)
   (since April 2013, before: President)

/ Stefan Delplace (Brussels, Belgium)
   Secretary General, European Association of Institutions in
   Higher Education (EURASHE)
   (since April 2013, before: Treasurer)

Treasurer:

/ Allan Päll (Tallinn, Estonia)
   former Chair, European Students Union (ESU)
   (since April 2013, before: Vice-President)

Ex-officio:

/ Eric Froment (Poitiers, France)
   Chair of the EQAR Register Committee

Appeals Committee

Chair:

/ Jürgen Kohler (Greifswald, Germany)
   Former Chair of the German Accreditation Council

Members:

/ Ossi V. Lindqvist (Kuopio, Finland)
   Former chair of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation
   Council (FINHEEC)

/ Stephan Neetens (Brussels, Belgium)
   Adviser, Ministry of Pensions

Deputy chair:

/ Thierry Malan (Paris, France)
   Former General Inspector, Inspectorate for Education and
   Research

Deputy members:

/ Geri Bonhof (Utrecht, the Netherlands)
   President of the Executive Board, Hogeschool Utrecht – Uni-
   versity of Applied Sciences
/ Gemma Rauret (Barcelona, Spain)
   Former Director, National Agency for Quality Assessment and
   Accreditation of Spain (ANECA)
   (since March 2012)

Secretariat
Director:

/ Colin Tück

Project Officer

/ Melinda Szabo

Events & Communication Officer:

/ Annelies Traas

6. Registered Quality Assurance Agencies

The following agencies were included on the register in 2013 (or for part of 2013). Agencies are included for five years counting from the date of their external review, the duration of inclusion is indicated in the table for each agency.

Further information on these agencies and the external review reports on which EQAR's decision are based can be obtained from: http://www.eqar.eu/register.html

Registered Agencies as of 31/12/2013:	Included since:	Inclusion until:
AAC-DEVA[6] - Andalusian Agency of Knowledge, Department of Evaluation and Accreditation (Spain)	7/10/2009	31/01/2014
ACQUIN – Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute (Germany)	15/04/2009	31/01/2016
ACSUCYL – Quality Assurance Agency for the University System of Castilla y León (Spain)	18/11/2010	31/12/2014
ACSUG – Agency for Quality Assurance in the Galician University System (Spain)	18/11/2010	31/07/2014
AEQES – Agence pour l'Evaluation de la Qualité de l'Enseignement Supérieur	03/12/2012	30/06/2016
AERES – Evaluation Agency for Research and Higher Education (France)	14/05/2011	31/05/2015
AHPGS – Accreditation Agency for Study Programmes in Health and Social Sciences AHPGS (Germany)	7/10/2009	31/03/2014

 Annexes

Registered Agencies as of 31/12/2013:	Included since:	Inclusion until:
ANECA – National Agency for the Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain (Spain)	07/05/2013 (05/12/2008	30/11/2017 30/06/2012)
AQAS - Agency for Quality Assurance through Accreditation of Study Programmes (Germany)	25/05/2010	28/02/2017
AQU – Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (Spain)	5/12/2008	31/07/2017
ARACIS – Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education	7/10/2009	31/03/2014
ASHE – Agency for Science and Higher Education (Croatia)	25/11/2011	31/08/2016
ASIIN – Akkreditierungsagentur für Studiengänge der Ingenieurwissenschaften, der Informatik, der Mathematik und der Naturwissenschaften (Germany)	15/04/2009	29/02/2016
CTI - Engineering Degree Commission (France)	18/11/2010	30/04/2014
ECCE – European Council on Chiropractic Education (Germany)	05/07/2013	30/06/2015

Registered Agencies as of 31/12/2013:	Included since:	Inclusion until:
EKKA – Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency (Estonia)	23/10/2013	31/03/2018
EVA – Danish Evaluation Institute	14/05/2011	31/03/2016
evalag - Evaluation Agency Baden-Württemberg (Germany)	25/05/2010	30/09/2014
IEP – EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme (Switzerland)	15/12/2011	30/04/2014
FIBAA – Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation (Germany)	15/04/2009	28/02/2017
FINHEEC - Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (KKA)	18/11/2010	31/07/2015
NVAO – Accreditation Organization of The Netherlands and Flanders	5/12/2008	30/09/2017
OAQ – Swiss Center of Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education	08/05/2012	31/05/2016
PKA – State Accreditation Commission (Poland)	15/04/2009	31/12/2013

Registered Agencies as of 31/12/2013:	Included since:	Inclusion until:
QAA – Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (United Kingdom)	23/10/2013	31/07/2018
QANU – Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities	14/05/2011	31/12/2015
SKVC – Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (Lithuania)	03/12/2012	30/06/2017
SQAA – Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency (Slovenia)	23/10/2013	31/07/2018
The Accreditation Institution (Denmark)	18/11/2010	31/08/2015
VLUHR QAU – Quality Assurance Unit of the Flemish Council of Universities and University Colleges (Belgium)	05/07/2013	31/12/2014[7]
ZEvA – Central Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (Germany)	15/04/2009	31/01/2016
Registration ended in 2013 (http://www.eqar.eu/register/former-entries.html):		
NEAA – National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (Bulgaria)	7/10/2009	31/07/2013

7 The VLHUR QAU was granted provisional registration based on the existing registrations of VLIR QAU (originally valid until 31/05/2014) and VLHORA QAU (originally valid until 31/10/2013), in accordance with the EQAR Merger Policy.   Annexes

7. Practices and Interpretations

(as of September 2013, based on the Register Committee's decision-making practice)

Introduction

The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) manages a register of quality assurance agencies that have demonstrated their substantial compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (European Standards and Guidelines, ESG[1]) through an external review, coordinated by an organisation that is independent of the agency and conducted by a panel of independent experts.

Based on a mandate by European ministers responsible for higher education (cf. London Communiqué, 2007[2]), EQAR was established in order to:

/ provide reliable information on credible quality assurance agencies operating in Europe;
/ increase the transparency of quality assurance;
/ enhance trust in and recognition of registered agencies and their decisions;
/ support recognition of qualifications and, thus, mobility of students.

The Register Committee is EQAR's independent decision-making body that decides on inclusion of quality assurance agencies on the Register. The Committee comprises of quality assurance experts from different backgrounds[3], who act in their personal capacity as independent experts.

The London Communiqué requested that substantial compliance with the ESG should serve as the criterion for inclusion on the Register. This is reflected in the EQAR Statutes and the Procedures for Applications[4].

The Register Committee considers whether an applicant quality assurance agency substantially complies with the ESG on the basis of an external review of the agency. This review has to fulfil a set of requirements in order to ensure its robustness and objectivity; these requirements are specified in the Procedures for Applications.

This document summarises the acquired practices of the Register Committee in considering compliance with the ESG and the principal interpretations it has made with regard to the standards.

In doing so, it aims to:

/ increase the transparency of the Register Committee's decision-making practice;

/ help demonstrate consistency in the Committee's practices, interpretations and decisions on applications;

/ aid external review panels in understanding how the Committee has interpreted the ESG and used external review reports;

/ facilitate the understanding of the Committee's public decisions.

> The relevant items of the EQAR Procedures for Applications (part A) and the text of each European Standard (part B) is displayed in boxes.

A. General Principles of Decision Making

The Register Committee considers every application on its own merits and solely in relation to the criteria for inclusion, as defined by the Procedures for Applications.

A.1 Substantial Compliance with the ESG

> [5]2.1 To be included in the Register, applicants need to demonstrate that they operate in substantial compliance with the ESG, attested through an external review in line with the eligibility requirements.
>
> **2.2** Parts 2 (2.1 – 2.8) and 3 (3.1 – 3.8) of the ESG shall be directly relevant for inclusion on the Register.
>
> **3.8** The Register Committee shall decide on every eligible application and either approve or reject the application.
>
> **5.1** All decisions by the Register Committee on eligible Applicants (in the sense of §3.8) as well as any decision concerning a Registered Agency (in the sense of §7.4) shall be published including an account of the reasons.

The Register Committee makes a holistic judgement as to whether or not an applicant complies substantially with the ESG. In doing so, it applies the following principles:

1. The Register Committee decision is the result of a conclusion that the agency is either found to substantially comply with the ESG or not. The relevant considerations are part of the Committee's decision[6].

2. The holistic judgement is based in the external review panel's findings, analyses of and conclusions[7] on the agency's compliance with the relevant standards (ESG 2.1 – 2.8 and 3.1 – 3.8).

3. Part 1 of the ESG is referenced in standard 2.1 and is thus indirectly relevant for the Register Committee's considerations. While the review report does not need to address each standard (1.1 – 1.7) separately it should analyse how the aspects addressed in these standards are reflected in the agency's processes and criteria.

4. The Register Committee does not use the standards as a checklist. That is, failure to substantially comply with one specific aspect of one specific standard does not as a general rule mean that an agency does not comply substantially with the ESG as a whole.

5. Should the Register Committee not consider the panel's conclusion with regard to compliance with a specific standard compelling, this is explained in the Committee's decision[8]. If a specific standard is not addressed in the decision it is implied that the Committee largely concurred with the review panel's analysis and conclusion without further comments.

6. Whereas the standards are requirements that have to be adhered to, the guidelines provide additional explanation of good practice in relation to the standard. The Register Committee therefore takes into account the guidelines when considering and judging upon an agency's level of compliance with the standard.

7. The Register Committee bears in mind the specific legislative, political and socio-economic context of each agency. The external review report, however, has to demonstrate how the agency meets the requirements of the ESG in its context.

8. The conclusion does not distinguish between substantial and full compliance, since for inclusion on the Register it is sufficient to substantially comply with the ESG. Likewise, if the conclusion is "not substantially compliant", no difference is made between partial or no compliance.

9. In its decisions, the Register Committee flags areas which warrant particular attention in the future (for instance, because compliance with the ESG is less obvious). When considering an application for renewal of registration, the Register Committee considers specifically the developments in these areas.

A.2 Evidence Base and External Reviews

> **1.5** The Applicant's substantial compliance with the ESG needs to be evidenced through an external review by an independent expert panel according to the provisions of these Procedures.

7 The review panel's conclusions might be formulated using the typical scale of "no compliance", "partial compliance", "substantial compliance", "full compliance"; or using another scale that the panel considers appropriate and from which the Register Committee can conclude the degree of compliance.
8 All Register Committee decisions as from May 2013 are published at https://eqar.eu/publications/decisions.html.

1.11 The review panel members shall represent a range of expertise, covering the different perspectives of the key stakeholders. The Panel shall include at least (at the time it is composed): a. one academic staff member of a higher education institution; b. one student of a higher education institution; and c. one individual from a country other than that of the applicant.

1.13 The self-evaluation report shall reflect on the applicant's compliance with each of the ESG in parts 2 and 3.It should be a critical reflection on the activities, strengths and weaknesses of the applicant and the added value they provide for quality improvement of higher education institutions.

1.14 The main basis for the Register Committee's decision making is the external review report. The facts on which the report is based have to still reflect reality at the time of application.

1.15 The external review report shall provide sufficient evidence of the applicant's compliance with each of the ESG in parts 2 and 3. It should encompass a summary of evidence, an analysis and a conclusion for each of the standards.

10. The primary basis of the Register Committee's decisions is the external review report, which contains evidence that has been reviewed and analysed by an independent expert panel (following the requirements of the Procedures for Applications). Additional information (provided by the applicant agency) is taken into account as far as it is reasonable and appropriate to do so. Bearing in mind that such information has not been reviewed by an independent panel the Register Committee aims to minimise the amount of additional information.

11. In principle, the Register Committee bases its decision on the factors prevailing when the external review was undertaken. The Committee, however, takes into account the major developments that have occurred since the external review, especially in response to the panel's recommendations.

Where agencies do not submit information with their applications on how they have acted (or plan to act) on the recommendations, the Register Committee usually requests the agency to outline its follow-up of the external review.

12. The Register Committee observes strictly the requirement concerning the composition of external review panels. That is, a review by a panel which does not include a student, an academic staff member and an international expert is not accepted for consideration. The Register Committee does not accept consultation with those constituencies (e.g. with students) as a

substitute for their presence on the panel.

13. The self-evaluation report and external review report must explicitly relate to the ESG and address separately each standard of part 2 and 3.

A.3 Eligibility for Registration and Scope

> **1.3** Organisations (or a clearly identified sub-unit thereof) that directly conduct external quality assurance reviews of higher education institutions, their organisational units (faculties, departments, etc.) or study programmes are eligible for registration.
>
> **1.4** Registration is open to organisations operating in Europe, regardless of whether they are based in Europe or outside, and regardless whether they are national or international in nature. This is, however, notwithstanding the requirements of ESG 3.2.

14. Only entities (organisations or clearly defined units of an organisation) that directly conduct external quality assurance activities (i.e. review, audit, evaluation, accreditation etc. of higher education institutions or programmes) are eligible for inclusion on the Register.

Organisations which carry out only meta-level activities, such as standard setting or exercising oversight of quality assurance agencies, are not eligible for inclusion on the Register.

15. The Register Committee considers that the ESG embrace a variety of quality assurance approaches, which are geared at both accountability and enhancement. The balance of these two is determined by each quality assurance agency in the light of its context, mission and objectives.

16. The Register Committee considers that neither the ESG nor EQAR's general objectives require that a quality assurance agency needs to have a permanent mandate by a national government to be within the remit of the ESG and, thus, eligible for registration.

17. The Register Committee considers all quality assurance activities (such as review, audit, evaluation or accreditation of higher education institutions or their provision) of the agency, in its home country and abroad, and both within and outside the EHEA. The external review report must thus contain a thorough analysis of all such activities.

18. Other activities that are by their nature not in the remit of the ESG (such as projects or the organisation of seminars) are not considered in considering applications for inclusion on the Register.

B. Interpretations of and Practices with regard to Specific ESG

2.1 Use of internal quality assurance procedures

> External quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

19. This standard relates to the crucial link between the activities of QAA's and the quality of higher education institutions and programmes. In order to provide robust assurance that agencies comply with the standard external review reports should include a thorough analysis of how ESG 1.1 – 1.7 are reflected in the processes and criteria used by the QA agency.

2.2 Development of external quality assurance processes

> The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.

There are no specific practices or interpretations related to this standard.

2.3 Criteria for decisions

> Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently.

There are no specific practices or interpretations related to this standard.

2.4 Processes fit for purpose

> All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.

The key elements of quality assurance processes mentioned in the guideline to this standard are addressed under ESG 3.7.

2.5 Reporting

> Reports should be published and should be written in a style which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find.

20. The Register Committee understands the standard to require that full reports are published, including for procedures that resulted in a negative decision or conclusion.
21. The Register Committee considers the absence of any public reports as a major deficiency; and that the publication of summary reports (rather than full reports) does not fulfil the requirement of the standard.
22. The Register Committee understands the standard to require that review reports also have to be published for voluntary or commissioned reviews of institutions or programmes, irrespective of whether they take place in the agency's base country or elsewhere, within the EHEA or beyond.

2.6 Follow-up procedures

> Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently.

23. The Register Committee understands the standard to require follow-up procedures for all reviews that contain any sort of recommendations, no matter whether they are informal or formal conditions.
It is up to the agency to determine the nature and timing of follow-up in the light of its mission and as appropriate in its context.
24. The Register Committee acknowledges that specific national legislation or the voluntary nature of activities might influence

the character of follow-up procedures and the extent to which they depend on the commitment of the institution or programme concerned.

2.7 Periodic reviews

> External quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance.

There are no specific practices or interpretations related to this standard.

2.8 System-wide analyses

> Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments etc.

25. The Register Committee considers that system-wide analyses are the responsibility of each agency, also in cases where an agency is part of a national or regional system. Whereas the title refers to "systems", the Register Committee considers that agencies should produce summary reports and analyses based on their quality assurance activities, irrespective of whether these cover a whole "system" or not.

3.1 Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education

> The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

See comments on the individual standards 2.1 – 2.8 above.

3.2 Official status

> Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.

26. The Register Committee considers that the requirement of formal recognition can be interpreted in a broad sense.

Agencies, however, need to demonstrate that they are bona fide, in particular in that they adhere to the legislation of all jurisdictions within which they operate and only evaluate/accredit/audit higher education institutions that operate in compliance with the legislation of their relevant jurisdictions.

27. Given the holistic nature of the Register Committee's judgement, the requirement of recognition in itself cannot be the sole reason for considering an agency not substantially compliant.

3.3 Activities

> Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis.

(Concerning the nature of activities covered by the ESG, see item 14.)

28. The Register Committee understands the standard to require that agencies directly conduct external quality assurance activities on the basis of permanently established processes. The Register Committee does not consider that occasional external quality assurance reviews of HEIs or programmes, implemented as ad-hoc procedures, fulfil the requirements of the standard.

3.4 Resources

> Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures.

There are no specific practices or interpretations related to this standard.

3.5 Mission statement

> Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.

There are no specific practices or interpretations related to this standard.

3.6 Independence

> Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

29. The Register Committee considers whether the structures and official status of an agency ensure its independence, as well as whether the agency operates independently de facto.

30. The Register Committee considers it essential that the integrity of expert groups' reports is ensured by preventing undue influence on the findings, analysis, conclusions and recommendations, and that the body which takes (accreditation, audit, etc.) decisions after external QA activities operates independently and without political or other influence by external organisations.

31. Where an agency's independence is not obvious from its structures and status, the Register Committee expects that the external review panel considers in greater detail how operational independence is safeguarded in practice.

For instance, where a governing body is composed exclusively of members coming from one stakeholder group, the agency's independence might be at risk and this warrants careful consideration.

32. If an agency has additional roles or functions at the same time, the Register Committee considers that that requires careful attention in terms of independence, especially as to whether adequate policies and processes are in place to safeguard independence of the respective organisational units in performing their QA functions.

3.7 External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies

> The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available. These processes will normally be expected to include:
> / a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process;
> / an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency;
> / publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes;
> / a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.

33. The Register Committee understands the standard to require that external experts reviewing an institution/programme should as a group approve the review report; if only one or some of the experts draft or sign off reports, without adequate involvement of the other experts, the Register Committee does not consider this in line with the requirement of "assessment by a group of experts".

34. The Register Committee understands the standard to require that students are part of an agency's groups of experts; it is up to the agency to determine the profiles and roles of student experts appropriate for its different external QA processes.

There was no case in which the Register Committee found an argument persuasive that student participation would not be appropriate per se in certain processes.

35. The Register Committee understands the standard to regard site visits as a key element that should normally be part of all external QA processes; if site visits are not part of the procedures used by an agency clear reasons need to be provided, and it needs to be explained what mechanisms are used to validate evidence provided by institutions in their self-evaluation document.

36. The Register Committee considers crucial the expectation in the guideline to this standard to have an appeals system in place. The ESG, however, do not prescribe specific features of the appeals system, such as the grounds on which appeals can be made and the possible consequences of an appeal.

3.8 Accountability procedures

Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.

There are no specific practices or interpretations related to this standard.