

Statement on the Modernisation Agenda for Higher Education

(22 June 2011)

The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) was established as part of the Bologna Process and gathers 27 European governments as well as the key stakeholder organisations as members. EQAR welcomes the European Commission's initiative to review the 2006 Communication "Delivering on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities".

The Quality Assurance Contribution

Quality assurance is a key tool to help addressing some of the challenges higher education in Europe is facing:

- Promoting mobility
- Supporting diversity
- Ensuring accountability

Effective quality assurance systems are an essential contribution to mutual trust between higher education institutions, quality assurance agencies and countries, and thus help to form a basis for smooth recognition of qualifications and periods of study, a main requirement for mobility.

Both internal and external quality assurance increasingly put the institutions' own mission and profile at the centre of the quality assurance process, and aim to help institutions improve in achieving their diverse missions, rather than to impose prescriptive standards.

At the same time, external quality assurance systems ensure accountability of higher education institutions to various stakeholders about the quality of their provision. In one way or another, external quality assurance often aims to answer the question: is the institution (or the study programme) living up to its promises, i.e. its own mission or the intended learning outcomes?

The European Infrastructure

At European level, the necessary infrastructure for quality assurance has been put in place during the past years.

The European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) have been a main driver for reform and development of institutional and national quality assurance systems. They have enriched the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by a set of important shared principles for quality assurance.

EQAR Founding Members:



The ESG have helped making different European systems more comparable. The use of learning outcomes in quality assurance is linked to student centred learning, a major reform of the concepts of study programmes within institutions.

The European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) was established as a natural next step on the basis of the ESG. EQAR provides information on reliable and credible quality assurance agencies operating in Europe. The Register lists agencies that have evidenced their compliance with the common standards enshrined in the ESG.

EQAR offers a reliable information source, preventing dubious organisations (accreditation mills) from gaining credibility and allowing national governments to recognise in their jurisdiction the results or decisions of foreign quality assurance agencies.

In supporting various other instruments developed within the Bologna Process and other European processes – most notably the ECTS, the Qualifications Framework for the EHEA and European Qualification Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF-LLL) – quality assurance makes a contribution to better articulation and recognition of qualifications throughout Europe, thereby facilitating mobility of students and graduates.

The Need for Commitment

The new Communication should encourage Member States to make full use of the existing European quality assurance instruments and infrastructure supporting recognition, mobility, diversity and accountability. This might include:

- Recognising results or decisions of EQAR-registered quality assurance agencies
- Facilitating the quality assurance of joint programmes by recognising processes of registered agencies in other countries
- Recognising all qualifications/awards from institutions that are subject to external quality assurance by EQAR-registered agencies
- Building on quality assurance systems as a basis for trust when implementing qualifications frameworks and recognition procedures
- Allowing higher education institutions to choose a quality assurance agency that best fits their mission and profile

The EQAR Annual Report 2010 includes an overview of examples from a number of countries that have already taken steps at national level to recognise the work of EQAR-registered agencies in other countries.

EQAR believes that more use could be made of the existing instruments established at European level in order to address the challenges of higher education today and to contribute to a greater convergence of structures, while preserving and promoting Europe's rich diversity in higher education.