

REPORT

of the

EXPERT PANEL

appointed to review the

**EUROPEAN QUALITY
ASSURANCE REGISTER
FOR HIGHER
EDUCATION**

August 2011

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1 Introduction

1.1 This is the report of the panel of experts (the Review Panel) appointed by the Steering Group **[Note 1]** established by the E4 Group **[Note 2]** to conduct an external evaluation of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). The review reflects the decision of the London ministerial summit in May 2007 which asked the E4 Group to establish EQAR and ensure that it was externally evaluated after two years of operation.

2 Terms of Reference

2.1 The Review Panel was invited to address three questions. These are given below.

- Are the organisational structures and methods of EQAR fit for purpose in the light of the agreed objectives? Have they functioned effectively and efficiently in practice?
- What has been the initial impact of EQAR? Is it in line with the desired goals?
- What improvements are desirable? How might the organisation develop and act further with a view to best achieving its mission and objectives?

The full Terms of Reference are attached as **Appendix 1**.

2.2 The Review Panel's Terms of Reference were agreed between EQAR and the Steering Group in October 2010. This followed preparatory work undertaken by the Steering Group working under the auspices and with administrative support provided by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation in the USA.

3 Review Panel membership

3.1 It was agreed that the evaluation would be carried out by a panel of experts in quality assurance of higher education and the workings of organisations in general. It was considered desirable for the panel to include members with a broad range of experience in relation to higher education and the Bologna Process **[Note 3]** in general and cover the perspectives of relevant stakeholders, in particular, higher education institutions, students and quality assurance bodies and involve a significant number of members representing a non-European perspective.

3.2 The appointment of the Review Panel was the responsibility of the Steering Group. EQAR was invited to raise substantiated objections in respect of proposed panel members. A list of the Panel members is given in **Appendix 2**. The Steering Group was given responsibility for designating one Panel member as Chair and one as Secretary. The Secretary was a full member of the Panel and was responsible for drafting the evaluation report in consultation with the Panel and under the direction of the Panel Chair, Sir John Daniel, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Commonwealth of Learning.

4 Acknowledgments

4.1 The Review Panel would like to thank all those who met the Panel in person in Brussels or by teleconference between 12 and 14 May 2011 and those whom members of the Panel contacted subsequently by telephone. The Panel is grateful for their availability, perspective and candour. A full list of those involved is contained in **Appendix 3**.

4.2 The Review Panel would also like to thank Judith Eaton who, as part of her role as Chair of the Steering Group, had overall responsibility for the recruitment and

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appointment of the Panel, the provision of briefing to Panel members, ensuring that the evaluation process was conducted in line with the Terms of Reference and providing logistical and administrative support to the Panel. All this she did with enviable efficiency and grace, seemingly oblivious to the different time zones in which she was working.

- 4.3 Finally, the Review Panel would like to thank Colin Tuck, the Director of EQAR, and Annelies Traas, Executive Officer in the EQAR Secretariat. Their attention to even the smallest logistical and technical detail and their immediate response to the Panel's requests for additional documentary material was greatly appreciated and ensured that the Panel was able to focus on its task for the three days of its visit.

5 Evidence base for the review

- 5.1 The Self-Evaluation Report (SER) produced by EQAR was a concise and valuable resource for the Review Panel. The report itself was supported by a number of appendices containing necessary contextual information (including, for example, details of the members and meetings of the Self-Evaluation Group, Ministerial Communiqués and EQAR Statutes etc) and evidence upon which the self-evaluation had been based (including, for example, feedback on the guidance for applicants, a summary of interviews with governments and stakeholders, and the results of a survey of quality assurance agencies). Much of the descriptive information relevant to the Panel's findings can be found in the SER (with which the Panel assumes familiarity on the part of the reader) and is not repeated in this report.
- 5.2 A list of the additional documentation requested by the Review Panel during its meetings in Brussels is contained in **Appendix 4**. The programme of face-to-face meetings and teleconference calls between 12 and 14 May and subsequent one-to-one telephone conversations with stakeholders unavailable at that time is contained in **Appendix 5**.

6 Considerations

- 6.1 In undertaking its review, the Review Panel was influenced by four matters in particular which Panel members agreed should be highlighted at the outset.
- 6.2 The first was the fact that the Review Panel's Terms of Reference specifically excluded the Panel from evaluating:
- the Ministerial decision to establish a register of quality assurance agencies as an independent, stakeholder-driven organisation;
 - the decision to use the European Standards and Guidelines (ESGs) as criteria for admission to the Register; and
 - the ESGs themselves.
- 6.3 Secondly, the Ministerial decision to undertake a review after two years limited the amount of time for EQAR to operate and therefore the volume of evidence available to evaluate its operation. More significantly, it limited the opportunity for evidence to evaluate the impact of EQAR, a point made by a number of those to whom the Review Panel spoke, and the extent to which the review could be either summative or formative.
- 6.4 Thirdly, whilst acknowledging that the decision to use the ESGs as criteria for admission to the register and the ESGs themselves were specifically excluded from the Review Panel's evaluation, the Panel, nevertheless, noted that the ESGs had

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been established primarily as tools for development, enhancement and capacity building rather than for registration purposes. Research evidence and practical experience suggest that there is always a tension between criteria and processes designed with assurance, compliance and accountability objectives in mind, and those with enhancement and developmental objectives in mind. This tension was noted by a number of those to whom the Panel spoke.

- 6.5 Fourthly, the Review Panel was mindful of the fact that EQAR was the first legally established organisation to emerge directly from the Bologna Process. This has had implications for the make-up and operation of EQAR, in particular the membership of its General Assembly (see paragraph 7.2).
- 6.6 The particular requirements of the Review Panel's Terms of Reference and the more general considerations above should be borne in mind when reading this report and its recommendations.
- 6.7 The Review Panel's recommendations are listed in **Appendix 6** for ease of reference.

7 Summary of the key organisational features of EQAR and of the Review Panel's findings

Organisational features

Objectives

- 7.1 EQAR was established in March 2008 as an International Non-Profit Association under Belgian law. The Statutes of EQAR set out that EQAR:

'... pursues the objective of furthering the development of the European Higher Education Area by enhancing confidence in higher education and by facilitating the mutual recognition of quality assurance decisions. [...] In order to achieve its objectives, [EQAR] establishes and manages a list of quality assurance agencies [...] that operate in substantial compliance with the [European] Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance ...'.

Wider goals and objectives for EQAR are set out in its mission statement, which was adopted by the first General Assembly in June 2008, and are contained in **Appendix 7**.

Governance

- 7.2 The Association's Members are the four Founding Members, (the E4 Group see paragraph 1.1 and Note 1), two Social Partner Members (Business Europe and Education International) as well as (currently) 26 European countries who are Governmental Members. The General Assembly (GA) consists of all 32 Members and is the supreme decision-making body of EQAR, except for decisions on inclusion on the Register. In addition, the General Assembly has four permanent observers, namely:
- The Council of Europe;
 - UNESCO;
 - The European Commission; and
 - The Bologna Secretariat.

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A full list of all the members is contained in Annex VII of the SER.

Management

7.3 Responsibility for ensuring that EQAR operates effectively rests with three committees, namely:

- the Executive Board;
- the Register Committee; and
- the Appeals Committee

The function and membership of each committee are described briefly below.

7.4 The Executive Board (EB) is responsible for the management of EQAR as an association, including administrative and financial matters and strategic coordination. It is made up of five members, one from each Founding Member and the Chair of the Register Committee, who is an *ex officio* member without voting rights. The EB is elected by the General Assembly for a two-year mandate and normally meets four times annually.

7.5 The Register Committee is responsible for deciding on applicants to be included on the Register. It exercises this responsibility independently to the extent that its decisions do not require approval or ratification by any other body, but it produces an annual report for the GA. The Committee is made up of 11 members. The four Founding Members nominate two members each and the two Social Partner Members one each. The Chair is elected by the nominated members and co-opted onto the Register Committee as its eleventh member. Five governments are nominated by the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) **[Note 4]** as observers on the Register Committee. The GA approves the Register Committee as a whole for a two-year mandate. It can only refuse the block nomination and not single nominations. Nominees may not currently hold a representative function or be a staff member of the nominating organisation.

7.6 The Appeals Committee is responsible for considering appeals against decisions of the Register Committee. It is made up of six members, including a Chair, who are elected by the GA for a mandate of four years. Members of the Appeals Committee may not serve on any other body of EQAR. Its Chair must be a senior judge, lawyer or legal expert. The Appeals Committee convenes as necessary when appeals have to be considered. At the time of the Review Panel's visit in May 2011, the Committee was considering its first appeal.

7.7 The General Assembly and its committees are supported by a Secretariat which is responsible for the day-to-day management and operation of EQAR. It comprises a full-time Director and a part-time Executive Officer.

Criteria

7.8 The EQAR SER describes the rules and criteria for applicants wishing to be admitted to the Register. The key criterion is that an applicant agency must demonstrate 'substantial' compliance with the ESGs as determined by an independent review of an agency applying for registration. EQAR accepts reviews carried out at national level as well as those co-ordinated internationally for the purpose of ENQA membership, EQAR registration and/or other purposes. EQAR acknowledges that this means that it often has to work with reports produced for purposes other than registration, involving procedures that are outside its control and base its decisions on reports produced, in some cases, some time before a decision on registration is made. Any

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evidence or information generated after the production of a report is not externally reviewed and is thus only taken into account to a limited extent.

Rapporteurs

7.9 A key role in the scrutiny of each application is played by rapporteurs who are responsible for analysing application documentation and preparing recommendations for consideration by the Register Committee, all of whose members act as rapporteurs on a rotating basis. Two members of the Committee are appointed as rapporteurs for each application. They act independently, reviewing documentation and recording their comments using an EQAR template. Those comments are then exchanged between the rapporteurs who discuss their findings, seek additional information for clarification if necessary, and then set out their agreed findings for a third rapporteur to review. A third rapporteur was introduced for the third application round, in the autumn of 2009, in order to strengthen the assessment process and enhance consistency. The views of all three rapporteurs on an application are placed before the Register Committee. Rapporteurs are not paid a fee for the work undertaken by them evaluating applications for registration, although each Committee member receives an annual Honorarium of €1,000.

Judgements

7.10 The Committee can:

- approve an application;
- request further clarification; or
- consider rejecting an application.

7.11 Only twice thus far has an application been deferred pending further clarification. Indeed, it was not clear to the Review Panel what further clarification, other than technical information available to all applicants, could be provided. An applicant can also withdraw an application instead of providing further clarification or making additional representation. There is no possibility of conditional acceptance of an application.

Effectiveness

7.12 The Register Committee has considered applications from 34 (approximately 50%) of the estimated 60-70 quality assurance agencies in Europe **[Note 5]**. Of the 34 applications received:

- 24 had been approved and were now on the Register
- 3 had been rejected
- 3 had been withdrawn (including one from outside Europe)
- 4 were in the process of being considered at the time of the review and one application previously rejected was providing additional representation

7.13 Eight full ENQA members had not applied for registration at the time of the review. In addition, at the time of the review, the Appeals Committee was considering an appeal against the decision of the Register Committee not to admit the applicant to the Register.

Efficiency

7.14 EQAR's Secretariat has 1.6 FTE staff (see paragraph 7.7) and an annual turnover of approximately €300,000. It makes good use of space, including sharing facilities with other organisations. EQAR does not conduct its own external reviews of applicant

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agencies but uses reports produced for other purposes (see paragraph 7.8). As already noted (see paragraph 7.9) rapporteurs are not paid a fee for the significant work undertaken by them evaluating applications for registration.

Summary

7.15 In the view of the Review Panel, much has been achieved by EQAR in the first two years of its existence. More than 50% of potential applicants were considered in that period (see paragraph 7.12). This has been achieved with a very small secretariat and relatively modest funding. The need to establish the Register as rapidly as possible and to do so with minimal resources has meant an emphasis at all levels of the organisation on operational matters with less time available for strategic and/or policy considerations. In addition, it is significant that, of those still to be registered, nine are full ENQA members and, presumably, meet the *de facto* criteria for EQAR registration. The relationship between EQAR and ENQA is considered in more detail in paragraphs 8.29 to 8.31.

Impact

Desired goals

7.16 As already noted (see paragraph 6.3), the Ministerial decision to undertake a review after two years limited the volume of evidence available to evaluate EQAR's operation and its impact. Indeed, a number of those who met the Review Panel indicated that, in their view, EQAR had not been in existence long enough for them to have sufficient evidence to be able to form a view on aspects of EQAR's work and impact. For these reasons the views and recommendations of the Panel are formative rather than summative.

7.17 The formal objectives of EQAR are noted at paragraph 7.1. Underpinning these objectives was a desire on the part of the E4 Group to:

- promote student mobility by providing a basis for the increase of trust among higher education institutions;
- reduce opportunities for dubious organisations or 'accreditation mills' to gain credibility;
- provide a basis for national authorities to authorise higher education institutions to choose any agency from the Register, if that is compatible with national arrangements;
- provide a means for higher education institutions to choose between different agencies, if that is compatible with national arrangements;
- serve as an instrument to improve the quality of quality assurance agencies and to promote mutual trust amongst them.

These wider objectives are also reflected in the mission statement adopted by EQAR (see paragraph 7.1).

Summary

7.18 In the view of the Review Panel, the SER appeared not to have had, or to have devoted significant resources to evaluating EQAR's impact on the above. The Panel was mindful of the fact that in some areas, for example, student mobility, the impact of EQAR is likely to be indirect rather than direct. Nevertheless, the Panel reflected on whether the absence in the SER of evidence of progress in achieving the objectives above was a matter of capacity; another indication of the limited attention paid to strategic matters within EQAR referred to in paragraph 7.15; or the complexity of

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establishing and running an agency such as EQAR. Whatever the reason, EQAR would benefit from establishing criteria indicating progress in meeting the objectives referred to in paragraph 7.17.

Improvements

- 7.20 EQAR's SER describes and evaluates its operations under different aspects of the three main questions formulated in the Terms of Reference of the current review. Each section of the SER ends with EQAR's own evaluation of its performance and proposes an action plan. As already indicated (see paragraph 6.7), the Review Panel's own findings and recommendations are listed in Appendix 6. They are considered in detail alongside those of EQAR in section 8 of this report.

8 Detailed findings of the Review panel

Term of Reference One: Are the organisational structures and methods of EQAR fit for purpose in the light of the agreed objectives? Have they functioned effectively and efficiently in practice?

EQAR self-evaluation

- 8.1 Part 3 of EQAR's self-evaluation considered this Term of Reference and concluded that '... by and large, stakeholders and governments consider the organisational structures of EQAR fit for purpose. While experiencing a number of typical challenges of new organisations, such as the internal communication between its bodies, EQAR finds that its structures have worked effectively and efficiently. EQAR considers ensuring broader support and engagement of governments as well as securing sufficient resources for its work as the main future challenges ...'. EQAR's proposed actions are listed in **Appendix 8a**.
- 8.2 In broad terms, the Review Panel concurs with EQAR's self-evaluation above and the proposed actions that are contained in Appendix 8a. In the view of the Panel, however, additional changes to EQAR's organisational structures and methods are appropriate if it is to improve its effectiveness and efficiency. The Panel also considers that there should be greater focus on strategic issues. These are considered in more detail in paragraphs 8.4 and 8.5.
- 8.3 Part 4 of EQAR's self-evaluation considered the work of the Register Committee in particular and concluded that '... external stakeholder feedback (did) not show major concerns ...' with regard to the consistency, fairness and proportionality of the decisions of the Committee. EQAR's proposed actions are listed in **Appendix 8b**. Again, the Review Panel concurs in broad terms with the proposed actions, to which reference is made, as appropriate, below.

Strategic focus

- 8.4 As already noted (see paragraph 7.15) the need to establish the Register as rapidly as possible and to do so with minimal resources resulted in an emphasis on operational as opposed to strategic and/or policy considerations. This approach was supported by some to whom the Review Panel spoke who argued that EQAR's role is regulatory not strategic and that to take on a more strategic role would involve 'mission drift' and could duplicate the work done by other Europe-wide organisations, including some represented on its General Assembly. This was not a universally held view amongst those to whom the Panel spoke. Nor does it reflect the view of the Panel.

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- 8.5 In the view of the Panel, it is desirable for EQAR to agree on its strategic priorities and incorporate these into a strategic plan. In addition, EQAR is increasingly likely to be asked by other organisations and institutions for views on a range of higher education matters, in particular, quality assurance in higher education, to which it should be able to respond in a well-informed and authoritative way. If EQAR were to devote resources to enable it to take on this more strategic function, it would enhance both its credibility and capability. Given the above, it is recommended that the General Assembly should amend its Statutes (Article 10) by adding strategic planning to its current list of functions. The day-to-day responsibility for this activity should be delegated to the Executive Board.

The General Assembly

- 8.6 The successful operation of EQAR requires both political sensitivity and technical competence. Neither is easily or speedily acquired and both should be available to the organisation for a reasonable length of time if the organisation is to benefit. At present, the length of time that a person can represent a Member on the General Assembly is not specified. This may result in a high turnover of personnel affecting, in turn, consistency in decision-making and could deprive the Assembly of the benefit of organisational self-knowledge in its debates. Whilst acknowledging the need to ensure awareness of, and the relevance of Members' experience and expertise to, changing external circumstances, it is recommended that EQAR promotes with the organisations nominating representatives to the General Assembly the benefits to EQAR of ensuring, as far as possible, that those representing them remain on the Assembly for three years renewable for a further three years. This recommendation may have some practical implications for student representation on the General Assembly, but it should be possible to make alternative arrangements. The same proviso concerning student representation is relevant to the recommendations in paragraphs 8.7 and 8.8.

The Executive Board

- 8.7 For similar reasons, it is recommended that members of the Executive Board should serve an initial mandate of at least three years (currently two years) renewable for up to two times (currently three times). This formula would not increase the overall length of time that an individual could serve on the Executive Board but would help to ensure that each Board member had a reasonable opportunity, and incentive, to make a significant contribution to the work of the Board in his/her first term of office and, hopefully, encourage productive and conscientious members to consider offering themselves for a second term.

The Register Committee

- 8.8 The successful operation of the Register Committee is critical to the effectiveness and credibility of EQAR. The requirement enshrined in Article 17 [4] of EQAR's Statutes that the Committee should deliberate and make its decisions independent of any other body is a key aspect of its operation. The Committee appears to have successfully established and jealously maintained its independence in the first two years of its operation - a point acknowledged by a number of those whom the Review Panel met - and is to be commended for this. In view of the technical expertise required for the Committee's successful operation, especially given the role of Rapporteur played by Committee members (see paragraph 7.9), and the importance of ensuring consistency in decision-making, it is recommended that members of the Register Committee should serve an initial mandate of at least three years (currently two years) renewable for up to two times (currently three times). As with the Executive Board (see paragraph 8.7) the overall length of service of each member is not increased by this recommendation. Paragraph 8.15 considers the role of observers on the Register Committee.

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Criteria for registration

- 8.9 EQAR's Procedures for Applications state that, to be included in the Register, applicants need to demonstrate '... that they operate in substantial compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area ... attested through an external review ...'. The Procedures go on to say that full ENQA membership '... normally constitutes satisfactory evidence for substantial compliance with the ESG ...'.
- 8.10 These statements notwithstanding, one agency withdrew its application due to what was described as the '... meta-level nature of its activities ...'. Another agency was rejected because it was '... not a quality assurance agency as envisaged by the ESG ...'. The application of a third agency was deferred because the Register Committee did not consider that the external review report provided sufficient evidence that it substantially complied with the ESG.
- 8.11 Where an agency whose application was rejected had already been admitted into ENQA (whose membership criteria require substantial compliance with ESGs), such a decision could be puzzling to say the least. Or where an applicant failed to meet what might be regarded as 'technical' criteria, for example, by submitting an evaluation report produced by a review panel that did not include a student member, the introduction of some form of pre-application scrutiny or advice could result in an application being deferred rather than proceeding to application and inevitable rejection.
- 8.12 In its own self-evaluation, EQAR proposes to revise the current Procedures for Applications by introducing formally a two-step procedure allowing for a distinction between the rejection of an application on the grounds of not meeting what it describes as the 'eligibility standards', namely the requirement for an external review, as opposed to not meeting the substantial criteria, namely the ESGs. In addition, noting that communicating the fact that the nature of the ESG and the approach of 'substantial compliance' cause some inherent difficulties and constraints, EQAR proposes making its own understanding and application of substantial compliance with ESG more transparent. Given these various considerations, it is recommended that EQAR should clarify its current criteria for establishing *prima facie* organisational eligibility to apply for registration. This would avoid unnecessary expenditure of time and reduce confusion and misunderstanding. It might also reduce confusion if the phrase 'eligibility criteria' or 'requirements' was used rather than eligibility 'standards' thus avoiding the appearance of having two sets of standards.

Confidentiality and transparency

- 8.13 In support of what it believed to be an appropriate degree of confidentiality for those involved when it began considering applications for registration, EQAR has thus far chosen not to make public the names of those agencies which have applied for registration, nor its decision on each application. Nor does EQAR currently publish reports of the Register Committee. This level of confidentiality may have been appropriate when EQAR's registration arrangements were new and its credibility as an organisation untested. In the view of the Review Panel these arguments no longer apply.
- 8.14 Notwithstanding the recommendations for procedural change made above (see paragraphs 8.5, 6, 7, 8 and 8.12) the Panel believes that the procedures now in place are sufficiently robust and the credibility of EQAR sufficiently well established for its

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initial concern for confidentiality no longer to be justified. Indeed, there is now evidence from those to whom the Review Panel spoke, and from within EQAR itself, to suggest that to continue with such a policy is likely to have a negative effect on EQAR's reputation and the credibility of the Register. EQAR's own self-evaluation led it to the conclusion that it should review its policy of confidentiality of applicants and consider whether full transparency, of successful and unsuccessful applications, would better serve its goal of transparency. Given these considerations, it is recommended that EQAR should enhance the transparency of its decision-making by making public the:

- names of each applicant which satisfies organisational eligibility criteria; and
- Register Committee's decision on each application.

8.15 Article 15 [3] of EQAR's Statutes makes provision for five governmental authorities to be nominated by the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) as observers on the Register Committee. The Review Panel did not hear a convincing rationale for this provision. Instead, the Panel noted that each observer is already a member of the General Assembly, to which the Register Committee now provides an annual report of its activities. In addition, the Committee is an expert as opposed to 'political' committee. Finally, applicants unhappy with a decision of the Committee may lodge an appeal, such appeals being heard by the Appeals Committee established for the purpose by the General Assembly. In the view of the Panel, observers may have made sense when the registration process was being established and tested. Given the points made above, however, and if the recommendations in paragraph 8.14, supporting greater transparency in its procedures, and in paragraph 8.31 clarifying EQAR's relationship with ENQA, are accepted and implemented, it is recommended that observers should no longer be appointed to the Register Committee.

8.16 One final recommendation that the Review Panel wishes to make in this section of its report is that each element of EQAR – the General Assembly and all three of its committees - should evaluate formally their effectiveness on a regular basis.

Promotion and publicity

8.17 Reference was made in paragraphs 8.1 and 8.2 to EQAR's own self-evaluation of its organisational structures and methods of operation in the light of its objectives and whether they had functioned effectively and efficiently in practice. Appendix 8a lists its proposed actions in response to this self-evaluation. Some of the recommendations, for example, to encourage governmental and stakeholder members on the General Assembly to promote EQAR more actively among their constituencies and beyond and to address the functions of and relations between EQAR's statutory bodies, are reflected in the next section of this report (see paragraphs 8.29 to 8.34).

Resources

8.18 The Review Panel would concur with EQAR's own conclusion concerning the need to explore possible additional resources. This would enable the Secretariat to support more effectively the work of EQAR's various committees, in particular the Register Committee, and also consider strategic developments and options as noted in paragraphs 8.4 and 8.5 of this report. The Panel is mindful that its proposals have financial and human resource implications the impact of both of which could be reduced if EQAR was to consider secondments for certain projects and activities.

Term of Reference Two: What has been the initial impact of EQAR? Is it in line with the desired goals?

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EQAR self-evaluation

- 8.19 Part 5 of EQAR's self-evaluation considered its initial impact and concluded that it had had '... a significant impact on 'soft' factors and (was) considered important by quality assurance agencies in order to demonstrate credibility in terms of alignment to European standards. The impact on 'hard' factors, such as official recognition of the registered agencies' activities in other countries, (had) begun to develop ...'. EQAR's list of proposed actions is contained in **Appendix 8c**. The Review Panel's own recommendations complement the proposals of EQAR.
- 8.20 In considering this Term of Reference, the Review Panel focused during discussions with those whom it met in May, not only on EQAR's formal objectives (see paragraph 7.1) but also on the E4 Group's more detailed expectations of what the Register might achieve (see paragraph 7.17). The evidence of impact in these areas was mixed. The Panel was conscious of the fact that EQAR's impact in some of these areas is likely to be indirect rather than direct.

Student mobility

- 8.21 This is the case, for example, in the area of student mobility. Some representatives of agencies on the Register who met the Review Panel indicated that registration had not yet affected student mobility. EQAR's SER noted that Erasmus Mundus joint programmes offered by Danish and foreign institutions in co-operation do not require additional accreditation by the Danish national quality assurance agency if they are accredited by another EQAR-registered agency. Whether mobility has increased, however, and whether that increase is the result of registration is difficult, and too early, to judge.

Accreditation mills

- 8.22 EQAR's SER made no reference to the impact of the Register on the opportunities for accreditation mills. One representative to whom the Review Panel spoke suggested that the Register had the potential to provide what was described as a 'white list' of genuine institutions. What was not clear was what impact the existence of the current list had already had on the number of bogus accreditation agencies or degree mills.

Competition

- 8.23 There was virtually no evidence of a national government agreeing to allow an EQAR-registered agency from another country to operate in its own country. There was some evidence of EQAR-registered agencies *within* a country being allowed to 'compete' for business but this was limited. Nor was there any evidence of higher education institutions choosing to be approved or accredited by a quality assurance agency in another country on the grounds that it was on the Register.

Improvement in the quality of quality assurance

- 8.24 There was some evidence of the potential for improvement in the quality of quality assurance agencies to the extent that one registered agency had been asked for advice and assistance by an agency considering applying for registration. What was more apparent to the Review Panel, however, was that the impact of EQAR registration of an agency is likely to be greater in a country whose higher education system is less well developed. Such agencies might derive relatively more benefit from being on the Register than agencies in a country with a more developed higher education sector. For some agencies, registration confirms the quality of the agency;

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confers status on the agency and can help to consolidate the country and its higher education sector in Europe.

- 8.25 It is perhaps in this area more than any other that the tension between the accountability function of the register and the developmental intention of the ESGs (see paragraph 6.4) is most apparent. Indeed, an implicit, and sometimes explicit, theme underpinning a number of the Review Panel's discussions with participants was whether the Register was a force for uniformity and conformity or competition and diversity. Part of the strategic review referred to in paragraphs 8.4 and 8.5 could with benefit include consideration of this issue.

Mutual trust between quality assurance agencies

- 8.26 There was evidence both in EQAR's SER and in the comments of those who met the Review Panel of confidence and trust in the integrity and independence of EQAR and of its procedures. Whether this has resulted in, or promoted mutual trust between agencies is too early to judge.

The student experience

- 8.27 A point made on a number of occasions during the Review Panel's meetings and reflected in this report, is the remoteness of EQAR and its activities from the lecture room or laboratory. It is for consideration whether the views of academic staff are appropriately or adequately represented in EQAR's deliberations. The interests of institutional heads are, to some extent, reflected in the EUA and EURASHE, both of which are, of course, members of the E4 Group. What priority these organisations give to the quality of the student learning experience and whether this is adequately reflected in the registration process is open to question. This may, of course, change as student funding arrangements change in Europe. Given these concerns, it is recommended that consideration be given to finding a way to give academics as a collectivity a voice in EQAR, which would help to embed quality assurance and the Register more firmly in institutions.

Term of Reference Three: What improvements are desirable? How might the organisation develop and act further with a view to best achieving its missions and objectives?

Introduction

- 8.28 A number of recommendations are already contained in this report, in particular affecting organisational structures and operational arrangements. Action in two other areas would, in the view of the Review Panel, have a major influence on the effectiveness of EQAR and its impact. The first concerns the relationship between EQAR and ENQA; the second, and related area of activity, involves the promotion of EQAR with governments. These are considered below.

EQAR and ENQA

- 8.29 In the view of the Review Panel, there remains an unresolved tension between EQAR and ENQA. The most obvious manifestations of this tension are: the use of the ESGs by both organisations, but for fundamentally different purposes; the awkwardness of the requirement to demonstrate 'substantial compliance' with the ESGs; the potential for different interpretations of this phrase by the two organisations; and the difficulty on the part of some ENQA members that have chosen not to apply for EQAR registration to see what value is added by being on the Register. Each of these aspects of the relationship between EQAR and ENQA was apparent in EQAR's own SER and in the Panel's discussions with participants.

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- 8.30 ENQA's commitment to the establishment of a register is not in doubt. Its publication, *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, published in 2005, committed ENQA and its partners in the E4 Group to developing a European register as a '... light, non-bureaucratic construction ... nominated by EURASHE, ESIB (now ESU), EUA and ENQA ...'. Whether the independent Register that has actually emerged is what ENQA envisaged is questionable.
- 8.31 It is clear from EQAR's SER that it sees the relationship between itself and ENQA as critical to the future. This is reflected in its proposal, for example, '... to explain more clearly the consequences of the differences in purpose and functions between EQAR and ENQA ...'. The Review Panel would endorse this proposal and recommends that EQAR should engage in dialogue with ENQA on a range of matters with a view to clarifying and making public:
- the differences in function and purpose of the two organisations;
 - their respective interpretations of the phrase '... substantial compliance ...' with the ESGs; and
 - their respective criteria for establishing organisational eligibility for registration and membership respectively.

Profile

- 8.32 Appendix 8c lists those actions which EQAR believes it should take to enhance the use of the Register and achieve greater impact. In general, the actions proposed are supported by the Review Panel although it is the view of the Panel that there is little evidence of demand at this stage for a '... special seal, label or stamp ...', one of EQAR's proposals for action.
- 8.33 In addition, in the view of the Review Panel, the proposal to promote the Register outside the European Higher Education Area is premature until a greater proportion of European agencies are on the Register. This latter prospect would be much more likely to be realised if more governments were to make registration by EQAR a requirement for their national quality assurance agencies than is presently the case.
- 8.34 The Review Panel is, however, convinced of the need for EQAR to promote the benefits of the Register both in its own right and as part of a drive to encourage governments to consider making the registration of their national quality assurance agencies compulsory. With this in mind, it is recommended that EQAR should be more pro-active in promoting its existence and the benefits of being on the Register. This could include encouraging the E4 Group to be more proactive in promoting the existence of EQAR and the benefits of registration.
- 8.35 In support of these initiatives, the Review Panel also recommends that the General Assembly should appoint a high profile, independent President capable of raising the visibility and promoting the benefits of EQAR with key stakeholders. Such an appointment should be for a period of up to four years in the first instance

9 Summary

- 9.1 Much has undoubtedly been achieved by EQAR in the first two years of its existence, despite the small size of its Secretariat and its relatively modest funding. The number of agencies now on the Register is testament both to the amount of work undertaken by staff and voluntary representatives of EQAR since its establishment and to the reputation that it has established as a credible and valuable organisation.

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- 9.2 This report makes a number of recommendations for EQAR's consideration as it looks to the future. They include recommendations intended to ensure that, as soon as possible, those remaining agencies eligible for registration apply for the Register.
- 9.3 In the view of the Review Panel, however, the greatest need is for time and resources now to be devoted by EQAR to considering its strategic role in the development of higher education in Europe. This is separate from, but builds on its current regulatory role. This has implications for: its relationships with other organisations, in particular, ENQA; the criteria and procedures used to determine those admitted to the Register; and the nature and scale of the financial and human resources required to take on this more strategic role.
- 9.4 The rationale for the regulatory role performed by EQAR remains. In the view of the Review Panel, the next stage in EQAR's development should reflect a more strategic role within higher education in Europe.

26 August 2011

Notes

- 1 The EQAR Steering Group for the external evaluation of EQAR was comprised of:
- Judith Eaton, president of CHEA (Chair)
 - Jan Schreiner Levy, Norwegian Ministry of Higher Education
 - Norman Sharp, former director of QAA Scotland
 - Martina Vukasović, Centre for Education Policy
- 2 The E4 Group is comprised of:
- the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education [ENQA];
 - the European Students' Union [ESU];
 - the European University Association [EUA]; and
 - the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education [EURASHE]
- 3 The Bologna Process, named after the city of Bologna where, in 1999, 29 countries signed a declaration marking the beginning of the reform process intended to allow Europe's diverse education systems to articulate better with each other, ultimately aiming at establishing a European Higher Education Area. Currently this process involves 47 signatory countries to the Council of Europe's European Cultural Convention.
- 4 The BFUG, as defined in the Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, signed in Berlin on 19 September 2003.
- 5 Europe refers to the 47 countries participating in the Bologna Process, i.e. all Member States of the Council of Europe, except Belarus, and in addition Kazakhstan and the Holy See who are signatories of the Cultural Convention but not members of the Council of Europe.

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Appendix 1

External evaluation of EQAR: Terms of Reference

(as agreed between EQAR and the Steering Group)

1) Background

1. EQAR was founded by the E4 Group in March 2008, following the mandate received from ministers at the London summit in May 2007. Ministers had asked the E4 Group to establish EQAR based on the E4's London Report and to ensure that the register was externally evaluated:

"We ask the E4 group [...], and to ensure that after two years of operation, the register is evaluated externally, taking account of the views of all stakeholders." (London Communiqué, 2007)

2. This was reiterated at the latest ministerial conference:

"We ask the E4 group [...] to continue its cooperation [...] and in particular to ensure that the European Quality Assurance Register is evaluated externally, taking into account the views of the stakeholders." (Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué, 2009)

3. EQAR has been receiving and evaluating applications for inclusion on the Register only since August 2008. The external evaluation should therefore commence two years from then, in the autumn of 2010.

2) Framework – mission and objectives of EQAR

4. The London Communiqué, the E4 Group's Report, the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG), the objectives defined in the Statutes and the Mission Statement constitute the framework in which EQAR has been founded and operates.

5. The London Communiqué (2007) sets out which aims European governments pursued in mandating the E4 Group to establish EQAR:

"The purpose of the register is to allow all stakeholders and the general public open access to objective information about trustworthy quality assurance agencies that are working in line with the ESG. It will therefore enhance confidence in higher education in the EHEA and beyond, and facilitate the mutual recognition of quality assurance and accreditation decisions."

6. The E4 Group's London Report (2007) had set out the objectives in further detail:

"The Register should assist in furthering the development of the European Higher Education Area by creating and managing a Register that will provide clear and reliable information about reliable and trustworthy quality assurance agencies operating in Europe. The Register's objectives would be to help to:

- *promote student mobility by providing a basis for the increase of trust among higher education institutions*
- *reduce opportunities for dubious organisations or 'accreditation mills' to gain credibility*
- *provide a basis for national authorities to authorise higher education institutions to choose any agency from the Register, if that is compatible with national arrangements*
- *provide a means for higher education institutions to choose between different agencies, if that is compatible with national arrangements*
- *serve as an instrument to improve the quality of quality assurance agencies and to promote mutual trust amongst them."*

7. When founding EQAR as a new and independent organisation, the E4 organisations defined its objectives as follows in the Statutes:

"The Association pursues the objective of furthering the development of the European Higher Education Area by enhancing confidence in higher education and by facilitating the mutual

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recognition of quality assurance decisions. The Association does not pursue to gain any profit from its activities.

In order to achieve its objectives, the Association establishes and manages a list of quality assurance agencies ([...] “the Register”) that operate in substantial compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area [...] and can demonstrate in particular that

- a. they operate independently, without interference in their decisions and operations from economic, governmental, institutional or other interests,
- b. they operate in an objective and responsible manner, and
- c. their quality assurance is based on well described procedures, which involve their stakeholders, and the results thereof are substantiated.”

8. The mission statement (Mission and Values, adopted by the 1st General Assembly) elaborates further on EQAR’s objectives. It sets out values that EQAR commits to:

“EQAR recognises the diversity of approaches to external quality assurance and is therefore open to all agencies [...].

EQAR is committed to the principles on which the ESG are based [...].

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.”

3) Purpose and scope of the evaluation

9. The external evaluation shall analyse the performance of EQAR in fulfilling its mission and objectives within the framework described above.

10. Therefore, the external evaluation is expected to address three main questions:

- a. Are the organisational structures and methods of EQAR fit for purpose in the light of the agreed objectives? Have they functioned effectively and efficiently in practice?
- b. What has been the initial impact of EQAR? Is it in line with the desired goals?
- c. What improvements are desirable? How might the organisation develop and act further with a view to best achieving its missions and objectives?

11. Thus the ministerial decision to establish a register of quality assurance agencies as an independent, stakeholder-driven organisation and based on the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), as well as the ESG themselves are not subject to the evaluation.

4) Coordinator

12. The coordinator of the evaluation will have the following responsibilities:

- a. agree with EQAR on the Terms of Reference
- b. assume overall responsibility for the evaluation process, including:
 - i. recruit and appoint the panel of experts
 - ii. provide adequate briefing to the panel, setting out the context of the evaluation
 - iii. make sure that the evaluation process is conducted in line with the Terms of Reference
 - iv. provide logistical and administrative support to the panel

13. The panel of experts bears full responsibility for the report and its contents, on which the Coordinator will not have any influence.

14. The Coordinator role is assumed by a Steering Group working under the auspices and with the administrative support of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).

15. The Steering Group comprises of:

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- a. Judith Eaton, president of CHEA (Chair)
- b. Jan Schreiner Levy, Norwegian Ministry of Higher Education
- c. Norman Sharp, former director of QAA Scotland
- d. Martina Vukasović, Centre for Education Policy

5) Self-evaluation

16. EQAR will appoint an internal self-evaluation group that will prepare a self-evaluation report. The composition of the group should reflect the roles and responsibilities borne by EQAR's different bodies for the organisation's work:

- 2 Executive Board members
- 2 Register Committee members
- 1 Observer on the Register Committee
- Director

17. The report will contain an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities for improvements and threats/constraints as regards the main questions of the evaluation (see "Purpose and scope"). It should not exceed 40 pages in length (excluding appendices).

18. The self-evaluation process will elicit the views of all types of partners and stakeholders (e.g. quality assurance agencies, experts who participated in reviews of agencies, users of the register).

19. The self-evaluation group will consult with EQAR's various bodies internally and bear final responsibility for the self-evaluation report. The EQAR General Assembly will be presented the final draft before it is submitted to the Panel.

6) Panel of experts

20. The evaluation will be carried out by a panel of experts in quality assurance of higher education and the workings of organisations in general. It would also be desirable if the panel included members with a broad range of experience in relation to higher education and the Bologna Process in general.

21. Panel members should cover the perspectives of the relevant stakeholders, in particular higher education institutions, students and quality assurance bodies. The panel should involve a significant number of members who represent a non-European perspective.

22. The desired profiles of the quality assurance experts on the panel should be elaborated further during the discussions with the Coordinator, in particular with a view to avoiding conflicts of interest. The panel might include:

- a. European expert, background in HEI (e.g. senior staff of a HEI)
- b. International expert, background in HE policy/management
- c. European expert, current or recent student
- d. European expert, outside stakeholder (e.g. HR responsible of an enterprise)
- e. International expert, background in QA (e.g. former staff of a QA agency)

23. The panel will be appointed by the Coordinator (CHEA working with the Steering Group) while EQAR will have the right to raise substantiated objections in respect of proposed panel members. The evaluation report shall include an account of the procedures followed by the Coordinator to recruit and appoint the panel members.

24. The Coordinator will designate one panel member as Chair and one as Secretary. The Secretary is a full member of the panel; s/he will be responsible for drafting the evaluation report in consultation with the panel and under the responsibility of the panel Chair.

7) Basis of the Panel's findings

25. The panel will base its findings on information gathered through:

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- Self-evaluation report and other documentation prepared by EQAR and made available at the request of the panel (see note on confidentiality below)
- Site visit to EQAR and interviews with the Secretariat, Register Committee, Executive Board and Appeals Committee
- Interviews with a range of different stakeholders:
 - o Members of EQAR (E4 organisations, social partners, sample of governments)
 - o Sample of European governments that are not members of the EQAR association
 - o Council of Europe
 - o UNESCO / CEPES
 - o Bologna Secretariat
 - o European Commission
 - o Sample of applicant quality assurance agencies (successful and unsuccessful)
 - o Sample of non-applicant quality assurance agencies
- Other interviews as requested by the panel

26. The evaluation panel shall review the final list of interviews/interviewees with EQAR. While EQAR has a right to raise substantiated objections to proposed interviews/interviewees it is ultimately up to the evaluation panel to take the final decision. In cases where it is not feasible for interviewees to travel to Brussels, interviews will be conducted by telephone.

8) Content of evaluation report

27. The evaluation report should serve two purposes:

- a. as a tool for improvement for EQAR, assisting the organisation to further develop with a view to best achieving its missions and objectives.
- b. as a tool for accountability to European governments, who have requested the external evaluation when asking for the establishment of EQAR, demonstrating the fitness for purpose of EQAR's structures and activities.

28. The report should set out the panel's findings and make recommendations for improvement. EQAR will have an opportunity to comment on the draft report and point out factual errors. The evaluation panel will bear responsibility for the final report. It should not exceed 40 pages in length (excluding appendices).

9) Actions following final report submission

29. The evaluation panel shall submit the final report to the Steering Group, which assures that the report meets the Terms of Reference, and submits the report to EQAR.

30. Based on the final report, EQAR will agree on a response to the panel's recommendations. As appropriate, the EQAR General Assembly will adopt a follow-up and implementation plan (proposed by the EB in consultation with the RC). EQAR will then publish the report together with its follow-up and implementation plan, and present it to interested external partners, in particular to the BFUG.

10) Confidentiality

31. Confidentiality, in particular in relation to applicants whose applications have been unsuccessful, is an important principle for EQAR. Thus, while the panel needs to have access to documentation on applications that were withdrawn by applicants or rejected by EQAR, the confidentiality of any such information must be strictly observed by the panel, the Steering Group and the coordinator.

32. Confidentiality clauses shall be included in any contracts with the Coordinator and the evaluation panel members. The self-evaluation report (if published) and the panel's report will need to be made anonymous where they contain references to confidential information.

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11) Timing

33. The indicative schedule of the review is as follows:

Initial plans for the external evaluation discussed	18/19 February 2010	endorsed by the GA
EQAR officially approaches the Coordinator	February/March 2010	EB and Secretariat
Terms of Reference discussed between EQAR and coordinator	July - September 2010	electronic consultation of the GA
Steering Group meets Final Terms of Reference agreed	8 October 2010	Coordinator
Appointment of the panel	December 2010	Coordinator
Draft self-evaluation report presented to EQAR members	March 2011	discussion by GA
Self-evaluation report submitted	end of March 2011	Self-Eval. Group
Site visit(s)	May/June 2011	Panel
Panel's draft report	September 2011	Panel
EQAR provides comments on factual accuracy	October 2011	Self-Eval. group
Seminar for EQAR members to discuss the evaluation results	October/November 2011	EQAR
EQAR adopts implementation/follow-up plan	November 2011	adopted by the GA
External report and implementation/follow-up plan finalised and published	December 2011	EQAR
Bologna Ministerial Conference, Bucharest	Spring 2012	

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Appendix 2

Panel Members

Sir John Daniel [Chair]

President and Chief Executive Officer
Commonwealth of Learning
Vancouver
Canada

Barbara Brittingham

Director/President
Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
New England Association of Schools and Colleges
Bedford
USA

Liam Burns

President
NUS Scotland
Edinburgh
Scotland

Eduardo Marçal Grilo

Professor and Member
Board of Trustees Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation
Lisbon
Portugal

Dr Lis Lange

Senior Director
Institutional Research and Academic Planning
University of the Free State
Bloëmfontein
South Africa

Páll Skúlason

Professor of Philosophy
University of Iceland
Reykjavik
Iceland

David Parry [Secretary]

Independent Higher Education Consultant
London
United Kingdom

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Appendix 3

Those who met the Review Panel in person in Brussels or by teleconference [T] between 12 and 14 May 2011 and those whom members of the Panel contacted by telephone after the meetings in Brussels

Organisation	Interviewee	Position
Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO)	Karl Dittrich	Chair of the Board
Agency for Quality Assurance in the Catalan University System (AQA)	Josep Grifol [T]	Head of Quality Assessment Department
Bologna Secretariat	Ligia Deca	Head
Council of Europe	Virgilio Meira Soares [T]	Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research
Education International	Monique Fouilhoux	Deputy Secretary General
EQAR Appeals Committee	Jürgen Kohler [T] Thierry Malan Stephan Neetens	Chair Deputy Chair Member
EQAR Executive Board	Andrea Blättler Helka Kekäläinen Lesley Wilson [T]	President Treasurer Vice President, Board and SEG
EQAR Register Committee	Kjell Frønsdal Lucien Bollaert Christoph Anz Gertie de Fraeye Mindaugas Misiūnas Júlio Pedrosa Henrick Toft Jensen Mala Singh Tanel Sits	Chair Vice-Chair Member Member Member Member Member Member Member
EQAR Secretariat	Colin Tück Annelies Traas	Director Executive Officer
EQAR Self-Evaluation Group [SEG]	Andrea Blättler Colin Tück	EQAR President EQAR Director
European Association of Institutions of Higher Education (EURASHE)	Stefan Deplace	Secretary General
European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education [ENQA]	Achim Hopbach	President
European University Association	Tia Loukkla	Head of Unit

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Appendix 3 [contd]

Organisation	Interviewee	Position
Ministry for Higher Education and Research, France	Yves Vallat [T] & H�el�ene Lagier [T]	EQAR GA & BFUG representative
European Students' Union (ESU)	Allan Pall	Vice-Chair
Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT)	Oddvar Haugland [T]	Senior Adviser
Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education UK	Carolyn Campbell [T]	Head of Networks and Partnerships
Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education	Radu Damian [T]	Director of the External Evaluation Department
Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the L�ander	Birger Hendriks	EQAR GA & BFUG representative
UNESCO/CEPES	Stamenka Uvalic-Trumbic	Chief: Section for Reform and Innovation

Post-visit telephone interviews

Organisation	Interviewee	Position
Business Europe	Irene Selig	BDA Germany
European Commission DG Education and Culture	Robin van Ijperen	Policy Officer
Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Germany	Peter Greisler	EQAR GA & BFUG representative
Ministry of Education, Turkey	Ercan Lacin	BFUG representative
Scottish Executive, United Kingdom	Ann McVie	BFUG representative

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Appendix 4

Additional documentation requested by the Review Panel during its meetings in Brussels

- Agenda of the 6th Register Committee meeting held on 13 and 14 May 2011
- Appeals Procedure: Criteria and process for Appeals adopted by the General Assembly in June 2008
- EQAR Business Plan, approved in January 2008
- Selected documentation of the processing of two successful and two unsuccessful applications for registration
- Rules of Procedure adopted by the Register Committee 29 June 2008

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Appendix 5

Schedule of meetings on 12-14 May 2011

12 May

- EQAR Self-Evaluation Group representatives
- EQAR Secretariat
- EQAR Register Committee representatives
- EQAR Executive Board representatives
- A selection of successful applicants for the register
- A selection of unsuccessful applicants for the Register
- A selection of non-applicant quality assurance agencies
- E4 Group representatives
- Government members and non-members
- Permanent observers on the General Assembly
- Additional organisations

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Appendix 6

The Review Panel's recommendations.

Governance

- i. The General Assembly should add strategic planning to its current list of functions. [Para 8.5].
- ii. EQAR should promote with the organisations nominating representatives to the General Assembly the benefits to EQAR of ensuring, as far as possible, that those representing them remain on the Assembly for three years renewable for a further three years [Para 8.6].
- iii. Members of the Executive Board should serve an initial mandate of at least three years (currently two years) renewable for up to two times (currently three times) [Para 8.7]
- iv. Members of the Register Committee should serve an initial mandate of at least three years (currently two years) renewable for up to two times (currently three times) [Para 8.8]

Criteria for the Register

- v. EQAR should clarify its current criteria for establishing prima facie organisational eligibility to apply for registration [Para 8.12]
- vi. EQAR should enhance the transparency of its decision-making by:
 - making public the names of each applicant which satisfies organisational eligibility criteria;
 - making public the Register Committee's decision on each application; and
- vii. Observers should no longer be appointed to the Register Committee [Para 8.15]
- viii. Each element of EQAR [see para 7.3] should evaluate formally its effectiveness on a regular basis [Para 8.16]
- ix. Consideration should be given to finding a way to give academics as a collectivity a voice in EQAR, which would help to embed quality assurance and the Register more firmly in institutions [Para 8.27]

EQAR and ENQA

- x. EQAR should engage in dialogue with ENQA on a range of matters with a view to clarifying and making public:
 - the differences in function and purpose of the two organisations;
 - their respective interpretations of the phrase '... substantial compliance ...' with the ESGs; and
 - their respective criteria for establishing organisational eligibility for registration and membership respectively [Para 8.31]

Profile

- xi. EQAR should be more pro-active in promoting its existence and the benefits of being on the Register. This could include encouraging the E4 Group to be more proactive in promoting the existence of EQAR and the benefits of registration [Para 8.34].

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Appendix 6 [contd]

- xii The General Assembly should appoint a high profile, independent President capable of raising the visibility and promoting the benefits of EQAR with key stakeholders. Such an appointment should be for a period of up to four years in the first instance [Para 8.35].

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Appendix 7

Mission and Values

[adopted by the EQAR General Assembly on 25 June 2008 in Sarajevo]

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

EQAR seeks to provide clear, 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 manages a register of quality assurance agencies operating in Europe that substantially comply with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance [ESG]

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 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 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.

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Appendix 8

8a Proposed actions from the EQAR Self-Evaluation Report in respect of its organisational structures

- i. To further encourage its governmental and stakeholder members to promote actively EQAR among their constituencies and beyond.
- ii. To further develop the General Assembly into a forum where government representatives can engage in strategic discussions on and influence the development of EQAR, and where broader policy discussions in relation to quality assurance are held.
- iii. To continue producing regular reports by the Register Committee to the General Assembly and to focus on being as transparent as possible about the Register Committee's decision-making process.
- iv. To improve communication between the EQAR bodies and to continue producing a regular Internal Newsletter.
- v. To explain more clearly that the nominees on the Register Committee are not *representatives*, but *independent* experts with different stakeholder backgrounds and to clarify this towards the nominating organisations.
- vi. To establish a Code of Conduct for committee members and staff, addressing, for instance, the principle of Register Committee members not acting as representatives of 'their' organisations in QA-related matters.
- vii. To specify in greater detail the desired profile for future nominations to the Register Committee. The profile should be adopted by the General Assembly. Nominating organisations should be asked to motivate their nomination.
- viii. To review the arrangements for the nomination of governmental observers on the Register Committee.
- ix. To organise a Joint Informal Meeting annually or every second year.
- x. To address at the next Joint Informal Meeting the functions of and relations between EQAR's statutory bodies, and to investigate whether any specific measures are needed and whether there is a need to revise the functions or memberships as defined in the Statutes.
- xi. To explore possibilities to seek additional resources that would allow an expansion of the current Secretariat and to diversify its funding base with a view to avoiding over-dependency on one single funding source.

8b Proposed actions from the EQAR Self-Evaluation Report in respect of the Register Committee

- i. To revise the Procedures for Applications in order to reflect the two-step procedure and formalise it, thus allowing for a distinction between rejections on the grounds of not meeting the 'eligibility standards' (requirements for external reviews) versus not meeting the substantial criteria (ESG).
- ii. To establish a record of precedent decisions structured along the ESG and other relevant rules (e.g. requirements for external reviews).
- iii. To make its understanding and application of 'substantial compliance' more transparent and to communicate that the nature of the ESG and the approach of 'substantial compliance' cause some inherent difficulties and constraints.
- iv. To explain more clearly the consequences of the differences in purpose and functions between EQAR and ENQA.
- v. To review its policy of confidentiality of applicants and consider whether full transparency (of successful and unsuccessful applications) would better serve its goal of transparency.
- vi. To further develop an introduction and training scheme for new Register Committee members in order to familiarise them with the criteria, procedures, principles and important precedents.
- vii. To investigate possibilities to further enhance the thorough scrutiny of applications in order to support the Register Committee's decisions.
- viii. To develop a complaints policy in order to streamline the dealing with concerns about registered agencies.

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8c Proposed actions from the EQAR Self-Evaluation Report to increase impact

- i. To further promote governmental membership of EQAR to the non-member Bologna Process countries, to address existing misgivings and misunderstandings, and to explain the advantages of being a Governmental Member. These efforts should address non-EU countries in particular and present information in an easily accessible manner.
- ii. To promote better the examples of countries using the Register as reference in their national legislation. This may include an easily accessible overview on the website or a presentations of examples and a discussion at one future General Assembly
- iii. To explain and promote more effectively how the Register can be used by institutions and students through more targeted and accessible information.
- iv. To promote further the Register and the ESG outside the European Higher Education Area with appropriate cultural sensitivity while being firm on the ESG as standards for inclusion on the Register.
- v. To consider which additional information on registered agencies and their activities in reviewing programmes and/or institutions would be meaningful to institutions and students, and to evaluate what would be feasible with the current resources and what would require additional resources.
- vi. To explore ways of Governmental Members contributing information for publication on the website on external quality assurance at system level.
- vii. To develop a communication strategy including various measures to enhance the information it provides and to gain increased visibility among its target audiences.
- viii. To develop a special seal, label or stamp (in addition to the normal EQAR logo) that registered agencies could use in their promotion.
- ix. To focus the General Assembly's deliberations on strategic discussions on EQAR's development and policy matters related to EQAR.