

Annex XV: Survey of Quality Assurance Agencies

The survey was conducted in October and November 2010. 46 quality assurance agencies participated. For the following summary, highly similar, repetitive and unintelligible or bogus responses to open-ended questions have been omitted.

1. Agency details (optional)

answered question	39
skipped question (= anonymous responses)	7

2. Is your agency active internationally, i.e. evaluates/audits/accredits institutions outside the country/-ies in which you are registered?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	53.3%	24
No	46.7%	21

3. Is your agency registered on EQAR?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	43.5%	20
No	56.5%	26

4. Has your agency applied for inclusion on EQAR?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes (pending, withdrawn or rejected application)	22.2%	6
No	77.8%	21

5. Is your agency planning to apply for inclusion on the Register in the future?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	50.0%	10
Not sure (yet)	30.0%	6
No	20.0%	4

6. If your agency has applied (or is planning to apply) for inclusion on the Register, what were/are the main motivations? Please rate the relevance of the following motivations:

	not relevant at all	not particularly relevant	rather relevant	very relevant	Response Count
Improve reputation nationally	9.8% (4)	14.6% (6)	53.7% (22)	22.0% (9)	41
Improve reputation internationally	7.3% (3)	4.9% (2)	36.6% (15)	51.2% (21)	41
Facilitate (international) recognition of HEIs/programmes accredited/evaluated/audited by your agency	7.5% (3)	15.0% (6)	25.0% (10)	52.5% (21)	40
Enhance possibilities to accredit/evaluate/audit HEIs abroad	20.0% (8)	22.5% (9)	25.0% (10)	32.5% (13)	40
Fulfil expectations of government(s) and/or stakeholders	7.3% (3)	22.0% (9)	26.8% (11)	43.9% (18)	41
Other (please specify)					5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To facilitate for institutions their national accreditation requirements by validating our international accreditation at the national level - By law the agency is expected to become a member of EQAR - Enhance cooperation with other QA Agencies and exchange of internationally recognized experts and best practices - The reason to apply was a result of strategic decisions on the national level. 					

7. If your agency does not plan to apply, what are the main reasons?

- answered question 7
- You require publication of reports, which converts an effective quality improvement process into an ineffective one due to the political load of the feedback provided and/or into a potentially harming one due to impact on the press
 - As we do not offer our services abroad we do not feel the need to be in the register. Being a full member of ENQA fulfills our needs for transparency, being quality assured via being externally evaluated, in addition to the services, e.g. networking, information exchange, contribution to shaping QA in Europe, that membership there entails. The membership fee in EQAR without being part of a general assembly via which we can actively contribute to the above is not feasible for us at this time.
 - Awaiting outcomes of evaluation and impact of EQAR.
 - Limited added value as we are already full members of ENQA
 - I still don't know if we want and need to apply
 - Because [...] will be replaced soon by [...] that is in the process of activation

8. Does registration on EQAR influence and benefit your agency's evaluation/accreditation/audit activities, or, if your agency is not registered, do you anticipate that it would?

	not at all	not particularly	somewhat	strongly	not sure	Response Count
Please rate:	7.1% (3)	21.4% (9)	33.3% (14)	33.3% (14)	4.8% (2)	42

How?

- We are very successful the way we are. However our accredited institutions would be potentially provided a better service if we were in EQAR thorough recognition by national accreditation agencies[...] universities will be obliged to carry our quality audits, but are free to choose a QA Agency out of EQAR. EQAR registration is therefore relevant for our recognition in [...]. At the international level, [...] is increasingly enquired to carry out accreditation at universities in other countries.
- The registration of our agency on EQAR will contribute to consolidate its position as an active participant of the higher education QA landscape. We are very active internationally (we have a considerably experience in accrediting abroad) and EQAR would contribute to increase our legitimacy as an external evaluator. At the national level, we have a considerable legitimacy, a clearly stated mission and a great power of decision, but, even under these circumstances, the registration would contribute to maintain our position and fulfill the expectations of our main stakeholders.
- Official recognition attached to an EQAR registration
- We are more aware of the conditions that characterize the context of our operations, in particular the issues of independence, accountability and fitness for purpose.
- The number of projects on quality assurance has increased after successful inclusion in EQAR. EQAR is an important step towards the recognition of accreditation decisions between countries (e.g. double degree programmes)
- some procedures are adapted in order to fully, rather than only partially, comply with specific ESG standards
- By facilitating further internationalisation of our quality audits and other activities
- We expect that registration (we will apply for registration in the first half of 2011) will lead to more evaluation and audit activities outside [...], that it will improve our possibilities to organise evaluation on a European scope and that it will improve our reputation internationally
- ENQA and the Bologna Process has already influenced [...] 's activities-- EQAR has reinforced this rather than having introduced an original new influence

9. Do your stakeholders consider it important that your agency is registered/applies for inclusion on EQAR?

	not important at all	not particularly important	rather important	very important	don't know	Response Count
Please rate:	2.3% (1)	30.2% (13)	32.6% (14)	32.6% (14)	2.3% (1)	43

10. From your perspective what is the most significant impact of EQAR on the development of the EHEA?

answered question

33

- Transparent information on credible, recognized agencies at European level
- It has caused a significant level of national and international confusion about the roles of EQAR and ENQA.
- Transparency and single registrar
- The development of a pan-european set of standards
- Up to now the answer is difficult, but I suppose that EQAR respectively the registration of agencies can contribute to the exchange of experiences and to further harmonization of qa practices
- thanks to an increased external accountability it could have an impact on mutual recognition of accreditation decisions linked to the recognition of qualifications
- It complements the ENQA assessment processes of QA agencies with an external institutional view coming from other bodies active in the Bologna Process Development.
- An exchange of experiences among equals, driving HE institutions to a minimum level of required quality to operate rather than to competitive excellence
- It is moderately significant. Cases such as the recent refusal of membership of the Norwegian agency may indicate more preoccupation with form and bureaucracy rather than with substance. The Executive Board should also include members with an outstanding academic and/or research position in HE to increase its legitimacy.
- To enable educational institutions the ability to seek accreditation that do not depend on a governmental agency. The independence of an external quality assurance agency for evaluating schools is critical for private non-state institutions of higher learning.
- EQAR has particular credibility, because of the involvement of the various stakeholders in its structures and decisions.
- In more countries, HEIs have the opportunity to choose among agencies rather than be obliged to use the national agency - particularly interesting in countries where there is only one national agency or in small countries
- The register seems to be of importance mainly for marketing strategies of agencies that are active as providers of services and accreditation labels in an competitive market. The added value for national agencies based on l a legal framework are is not visible and for teh development of the EHEA is not visible. Competences between ENQA and EQAR are also unclear.
- It allows relevant stakeholders to know of the agencies that fulfills the European Standards. Therefore there is a very useful tool for the stakeholders even from outside Europe as well.
- It sets a benchmark for QA agencies

- EQAR's 'brand' value, if it captures people's imagination, could be a major contribution to the EHEA

11. Are your agency's expectations (related to a European register of QA agencies) reflected in the mission and objectives of EQAR? To what degree have these been fulfilled?

answered question

29

- It is difficult to evaluate this as the number of listed agencies is still very limited and particularly limited to a number of countries. It is noteworthy that where there is more than one QA agency in a country, there is a greater likelihood that they are members of EQAR, e.g. Spain, Germany and Ireland
- Yes, up to now an answer is difficult since we are registered since 4 months.
- In general there is an important overlap with the ENQA mission and objectives. For example, it is not clear to what extent EQAR is increasing the level of transparency of Quality Assurance for Higher Education. The same can be stated on how EQAR is adding elements to enhance the QA agencies.
- Yes, they are. However, procedures should become more transparent. This includes eliminating the practice of accepting reviews conducted by ENQA as a basis for decisions on membership. The ESG do not accept that agencies run by HEIs guarantee enough independence when assessing HEIs (e.g. earlier systems in [...]). Therefore, ENQA being an association of QA agencies should not be considered sufficiently independent to review their own membership.
- We feel there is an extremely good fit between the mission and objectives of EQAR and those of [...]. We are still in the process of applying for EQAR so are unable to determine if the 'expectations' have been met, but we suspect they will be.
- We don't see a close connection between these two items. The main reason for applying for the register was that other agencies would do it.
- expectations: as above: increase credibility and reputation internationally fulfilled to the extent that some countries have opened up their system and that the EQAR seems to be widely known (at least at agency, not necessarily at HEI level)
- The mission and objectives of EQAR are so generic that it is difficult to value their real impact. Moreover, to some extent there is a duplication of objectives to other existing developments and organisations (e.g. Bologna Process, ENQA, ECA...).
- The objectives of EQAR are already covered by networks as there are ENQA and ECA. The register is duplicating existing structures, increasing bureaucracy and costs. As for trustbuilding amongst QA agencies and HEI the register is not an adequate instrument because the information provided is rather superficial and inclusion criteria not transparent enough. The same goes for quality improvement for agencies. This task can be better tackled by the respective QA-networks.
- We would have expected a more active relation as members, after being included in 2008. The only information available is either the newsletter or the Annual Report which have both a general dissemination for EQAR members and non members.
- Yes. It's too early to speak of objectives being fulfilled.

12. To what extent do you consider EQAR's activities thus far have been fit to achieve the different objectives formulated by ministers and the E4 Group?

	not fit for purpose at all	not particularly fit for purpose	rather fit for purpose	very fit for purpose	don't know	Response Count
Provide clear and reliable information on QAAs	7.3% (3)	14.6% (6)	39.0% (16)	36.6% (15)	2.4% (1)	41
Enhance quality of and trust amongst QAAs	9.8% (4)	17.1% (7)	46.3% (19)	22.0% (9)	4.9% (2)	41
Reduce opportunities for "accreditation mills"	7.3% (3)	12.2% (5)	43.9% (18)	22.0% (9)	14.6% (6)	41
Facilitate mutual trust and recognition	7.3% (3)	22.0% (9)	36.6% (15)	29.3% (12)	4.9% (2)	41
Promote student mobility	20.0% (8)	40.0% (16)	12.5% (5)	7.5% (3)	20.0% (8)	40
Provide a basis for HEIs to choose between different agencies	4.9% (2)	22.0% (9)	34.1% (14)	29.3% (12)	9.8% (4)	41
Comments (optional):						8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It probably provides a basis for HEIs to choose between different agencies, however, [...] legislation requires that [...]HEIs be evaluated by [...] - The methodology used and the results produced so far need to be improved and action to create more trust on EQAR is necessary. Please do not create another bureaucracy. - No data provided about use of the Register to information. We don't know about student mobility, for example, who uses the Register and for what purpose? - It is a general weakness (in the EQAR mission) that reports on decisions are not published in order to fulfil the aims of transparency and trust in the system e.g. why do agencies that have applied for EQAR not fulfil the ESG. - Don't knows selected because it's too early to tell – much depends on how well-known EQAR becomes and how quickly. 						

13. As far as you can judge from any interaction with EQAR, how satisfied are you in terms of:

	not satisfied at all	not particularly satisfied	rather satisfied	very satisfied	cannot tell	Response Count
Clarity of the application process	0.0% (0)	4.9% (2)	36.6% (15)	48.8% (20)	9.8% (4)	41
Transparency of criteria for	4.9% (2)	19.5% (8)	22.0% (9)	46.3% (19)	7.3% (3)	41

13. As far as you can judge from any interaction with EQAR, how satisfied are you in terms of:

	4.9% (2)	19.5% (8)	24.4% (10)	24.4% (10)	26.8% (11)	41
inclusion						
Proportionate, consistent and fair decision-making						
Information on the EQAR website	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	31.7% (13)	58.5% (24)	9.8% (4)	41
Other EQAR publications	0.0% (0)	2.5% (1)	20.0% (8)	40.0% (16)	37.5% (15)	40
Availability for requests, questions etc	0.0% (0)	2.5% (1)	7.5% (3)	65.0% (26)	25.0% (10)	40

14. Do you perceive the decision-making process of EQAR's Register Committee to be independent of stakeholder and third-party interest?

	not independent at all	not particularly independent	rather independent	very independent	cannot tell	Response Count
Please rate:	2.4% (1)	7.3% (3)	26.8% (11)	26.8% (11)	36.6% (15)	41
If possible, please explain/elaborate on what creates that impression:						14

- There is a real difficulty when a significant number of members of the Register Committee have to disallow themselves from a decision because of a possible conflict of interest.
- similar situations are likely to be weighted differently according to subjective criteria and previous reputation of an agency
- EQAR uses clear criteria for inclusion
- Every move you make must satisfy all national governments in the end. Therefore, you only will be able to reach minimum common denominators.
- The concern that 'government' minister involvement may not judge 'independent' accreditation agencies fairly and favor 'governmental' sponsored accreditation agencies.
- I have neither valid information nor closer idea about the decision making process of the Committee. In our case it has been consistent and transparent, and there were no indications about any biases.
- In my opinion absolute independence is very hard to achieve. So we can speak about multidependence of different stakeholders involved in the QA process. EQAR meets this requirement.
- The register committee can decide on registration independently from the ENQA board decisions regarding membership applications. There is however little transparency when it comes to the background of differences.
- No transparency about the independence of stakeholder and third-party interest is provided.

- I think that the members of the Register Committee don't have any conflict of interest in relation with the agencies.
- We had a very fluent communication with the EQAR secretariat when planning the application process. The secretariat was very helpful in discussing possible dates for application, which in our case were tight. We were given answers when in doubt about the procedures and we were notified of development in the application process where relevant. As for the application of criteria and proportionality between effort/means and goals, we felt that duplication of efforts was avoided, given that the ENQA review was readily accepted as the basis for our application

15. How do you consider EQAR should develop its work or structures further with a view to better achieving its mission and objectives?

answered question

25

- It is hard to see how EQAR can become effective if it is reliant solely on application of ENQA members. It has no mechanism in place to commission its own reviews or has not done so to date. The real test will be when an application is received from a non-ENQA member.
- Consider more the actions to be undertaken to facilitate promotion of the agencies from developing countries
- organise events and do R&D work/projects
- The process apparently relies more on compliance with rules than on the actual confirmation that the Agency is acting in an effective and efficient way.
- In future, it would be interesting to know more details the impact of EQAR-membership on the operation of QA agencies (eg. such as case studies). Also, the view of the HEI may be interesting. EQAR should continue to provide information at conferences.
- Work in closer cooperation with ENQA and consider the national context of QAAs. Recognize full-membership in ENQA as a precondition for inclusion on EQAR irrespective of degree of compliance with the ENQA requirements (substantial or full).
- EQAR should investigate whether it should and how it can develop fit-for-purpose criteria for inclusion, distinct from the ESG.
- benefits to agencies should be more clearly communicated, HEIs should be better informed about role of EQAR - what does it mean if an agency is listed on EQAR on top of being ENQA full member
- publish reports on decision to create full transparency
- Put more effort into promotion of the EQAR brand

16. How could EQAR improve the application process, the information/guidance for applicants and/or feedback possibilities for quality assurance agencies?

answered question

21

- More information and clarification on importance of membership to national governments and HEIs
- The Internet site needs improvement, being rather cumbersome to use. The ESG need to be revised.

- It would be helpful to have 'templates' for responding to questions posed in the application process. In addition, a specific workshop on applying for EQAR would be helpful.
- process should be more aligned with ENQA full membership as criteria seem to be the same currently, double effort for agencies
- We felt that the process was very clear, and that the secretariat was very helpful in reassuring us that we had well understood the procedures.

17. What else would you – from your perspective as a quality assurance agency – expect from EQAR for the future?

answered question

24

- To attempt to resolve the issue of ENQA and EQAR both having to recognise external review reports. It is hard to see why agencies have to pay an annual listing fee that is the same price as the application fee. The annual listing of members cost nothing. The application process is what EQAR has to spend its resources on.
- We would expect that accreditation decisions taken by the agencies listed in the Register would imply the automatic recognition of qualifications of the accredited programs by the recognition bodies and by the HEI in Europe. For some professions additional rules might apply. We would also expect that, for cross-borders joint degrees, 1 accreditation from ANY agency listed in the register should be sufficient and all governments supporting the Register should not require any further QA verification at their national level.
- The decisions on the admission process need to be clearly seen as absolutely independent from accreditation agencies, which is not the case at present. The Executive Board should have a more academic composition rather the present more bureaucratic composition
- The EQAR has a major role for higher education in Europe and beyond. Providing accreditation agencies the opportunity to be included is important and should be encouraged.
- We don't know what EQAR is doing for us. We were not addressed by a news letter or something else.
- To work actively towards wider recognition of EQAR registration; ECA would not be necessary if EQAR would be more engaged to fulfilling the Lisbon agreement; there should be greater efforts made within Bologna-Europe towards transnational accreditation recognition
- Greater transparency about processes, criteria for approval, data on users and use to support confidence in the Register as a useful source of information.
- The Register should include at least one agency for each country in the EHEA. The mission and competences of each agency should be made clear to avoid any possibility of misuse of its status as EQAR listed agency (for instance an agency specialized in Engineering programs should not be eligible to evaluate Economic sciences programs)

18. Please add any additional comments you wish to make:

answered question 15

- The position of EQAR in the Bologna Process should be reconsidered taking into consideration other Bologna actors (ENQA). A possible added value for EQAR is, besides the ENQA reviews, to confirm the alignment of QA agencies- national policies - and international stakeholders expectations.
- I really hope EQAR works in the end but I have serious doubts about its usefulness if its role does not change.
- The costs involved for a not-for-profit organisation, without sponsorship, to achieve and maintain its registration are very high and take money from its real work and objectives of improving HE. Are the cost fully justified? Perhaps this needs to be reconsidered.
- Congratulation to the EQAR staff for the good management and international presence (despite the limited staff resources).
- Without having been through the application process, it was difficult to answer some of the questions which appeared to be more focused on those who have applied. it would also have been useful to have more information on the self-evaluation process and report.
- There has been a lack of information amongs the HE sector in Europe about the procedure regarding the external review of EQAR. For instance the fact that CHEA has been appointed as the body in charge of coordination this process. This could be understood a an example of the above mentioned lack of particular information provided to the EQAR members.