EQAR Members' Dialogue

21/22 November 2011

Vienna

Hosted by the

Austrian Ministry of Science and Research

Venue:

Palais Harrach, Freyung 3, 1010 Wien

Objectives

The Members' Dialogue will gather all EQAR members and committees. It will serve as an opportunity to discuss the results of the external evaluation of EQAR and to exchange ideas for the follow-up and implementation plan.

More precisely, the Dialogue's objectives are to:

- serve as a unique opportunity for all those involved in EQAR's governance, management and operation to discuss jointly and in a more informal atmosphere than in official meetings with strict agendas.

- discuss and reflect on the results of the external evaluation.

- elaborate on ideas for change and improvement as follow-up to the external evaluation.

Participants

- EQAR members:

    27 governments; E4 organisations: ENQA, ESU, EUA, EURASHE; BUSINESSEUROPE, Education International

    Permanent observers: Council of Europe, UNESCO, European Commission, Bologna Secretariat

- EQAR committees:

    Executive Board, Register Committee, Appeals Committee

- EQAR Secretariat

Approximate total: 55 – 60

Format

The Members' Dialogue is organised in two half days, with a mix of plenary and parallel sessions. The timing should allow people from most origins to travel to the meeting with only one overnight stay.

The focus of the Dialogue is to discuss the evaluation results along the main question of how to enhance the impact and use of the Register in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

Sunday 20 November 2011

13:00	*Register Committee meeting*
	(for Register Committee members and observers only)
20:00	**Optional dinner** for early arrivals & Register Committee
	Restaurant Rubens, Fürstengasse 1, 1090 Wien

Monday 21 November 2011

9:00   *Register Committee meeting*
        (for Register Committee members and observers only)

12:30   **Lunch** (small buffet served at the venue)

13:30   **Welcome Session**

- Welcome by EQAR

- Introduction of the meeting objectives and agenda

13:45   **External Evaluation and Self-Evaluation Process**

<u>Chair</u>:   **Andrea Blättler**, President, EQAR Executive Board

<u>Speaker</u>:   **Lucien Bollaert**, Vice-Chair, EQAR Register Committee

- General overview of findings: what are the main lessons learned from the external evaluation? What are the panel's recommendations?

- EQAR's strategy for the next years: what are the main questions arising from the evaluation? The EB's first thoughts on key issues.

14:30   **Discussion Panel: Changes in the Higher Education Landscape and the Future Role of External Quality Assurance**

<u>Chair</u>:   **Dáire Keogh**, EQAR Register Committee

<u>Experts</u>:   **Carita Blomqvist**, President of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee

Oliver Vettori, Head of Quality Management and Program Delivery, Vienna University of Economics and Business

Predrag Lažetić, Director of the Centre for Education Policy (CEP)

16:00   **Coffee break**

16:30   Parallel sessions with the overarching theme:

Developing Strategies to Enhance the Impact and Relevance of EQAR

Three parallel sessions, addressing each some of the wider objectives formulated for EQAR, along common guiding questions:

- What should be strategic goals for EQAR in relation to the wider objectives discussed in the session?

- Which measures and activities are necessary from EQAR and other actors to achieve these goals?

- How can EQAR acquire sufficient resources to implement these activities?

The wider objectives, as formulated in EQAR's Mission Statement and the E4 Group Report to the London Summit, are grouped in three strands:

1. **Transparency and Information**

   Chair: **Dorte Kristoffersen**, EQAR Register Committee

2. **Trust and Confidence**

   Chair: **Lesley Wilson**, EQAR Executive Board

3. **Recognition**

   Chair: **Jacob Fuchs**, Ministry of Research, Innovation and Higher Education, Denmark

Further descriptions of the parallel sessions are available on the following pages.

18:00   End

19:30   **Conference Dinner**

Heuriger Steinschaden, Kahlenberger Straße 18, 1190 Wien

Tuesday 22 November 2011

9:30	**Welcome** by the Austrian Ministry of Science and Research

<u>By</u>: **Friedrich Faulhammer, Secretary General**

9:40 **Parallel Sessions** (continued)

10:30 **Special Session on the European Standards and Guidelines**

<u>Chair</u>: **Janja Komljenovič**, MAP-ESG Advisory Board

<u>Speakers</u>: **Fiona Crozier**, Chair, MAP-ESG Steering Group

Kjell Frønsdal, Chair, EQAR Register Committee

- Main findings and results of the MAP-ESG project presented by the MAP-ESG Steering Group

- EQAR input to MAP-ESG and reflections on the main findings by the Register Committee

- What should be EQAR's role and input for the upcoming revision of the ESG?

- How will EQAR work with the current ESG between now and 2015, when the revision will be completed?

11:30 **Coffee break**

12:00 **Round-Up and Conclusions from Parallel Sessions**

<u>Chair</u>: **Germain Dondelinger**, Director General, Ministry of Higher Education and Research, Luxembourg

<u>Input</u>: rapporteurs of the three parallel sessions

- Key messages from the parallel sessions along the guiding questions, presented by rapporteurs

- Overarching discussion on EQAR's future strategies to enhance the impact and relevance of the Register

13:45 **Closing**

- Next steps: how the Members' Dialogue results will feed into the Follow-Up and Implementation Plan (or: a Strategic Plan)

14:00 **Optional lunch or departure**

(agenda as of 16/11/2011)

Parallel Session 1:

Transparency and Information

Chair: **Dorte Kristoffersen**, EQAR Register Committee

Rapporteur: **Luka Juroš**, Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, Croatia

The overarching objective of the parallel sessions is to develop strategies to enhance the impact and relevance of EQAR. Each session addresses one main strand of EQAR's wider objectives formulated in the EQAR Mission Statement and the E4 Group Report to the London Summit.

The main questions for all parallel session are: What should be strategic goals for EQAR in relation to the wider objectives? Which measures and activities are necessary from EQAR and other actors to achieve these goals? How can EQAR acquire sufficient resources to implement these activities?

The themes, specific guiding questions and a summary of background information for this session are set out in the following.

Themes

- Information provided by EQAR on registered agencies and their work
- Relationship between EQAR and ENQA
- Transparency of EQAR decisions

Guiding Questions

– To which target groups and audiences should EQAR promote its work and objectives in general?

  – What role should stakeholder organisations (E4, BE, EI) have in promoting EQAR?

  – What role should governments assume?

– How can the transparency of EQAR's work be enhanced?

  – What are the opportunities and risks related to publishing full Register Committee decisions (positive and negative)?

– Are there areas that need clarification, such as eligibility requirements and substantial criteria for inclusion? How best to explain the different missions and natures of EQAR and ENQA?

– What information should EQAR provide about registered agencies?

  – How useful is the information currently provided?

  – How can information be made more easily accessible?

- Could the Register include additional links to other information sources? Which ones would be useful?

EQAR Mission and Objectives

London Communiqué:

"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."

EQAR Mission Statement:
- "increasing transparency of quality assurance, and thus enhancing trust and confidence in European higher education."
- "to provide clear reliable information on quality assurance provision in Europe, thus improving trust among agencies."
- "make transparent its mode of operation and its procedures while ensuring necessary confidentiality."

Purpose and Objectives from E4 Report:
- "... provide clear and reliable information about reliable and trustworthy quality assurance agencies operating in Europe."
- "... an objective information tool and should not serve any other purpose."

Key Findings of the External Evaluation Report

Promotion of EQAR

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.

Eligibility requirements and criteria for inclusion

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:   [...] 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. [...]

Publication of decisions

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:   [...] the Panel believes that the procedures now in place are sufficiently robust and the credibility of EQAR sufficiently well established for its 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:

   A.   names of each applicant which satisfies organisational eligibility criteria; and

   B.   Register Committee's decision on each application.

Roles of 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. [...]

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.

Trust and Confidence

Chair: **Lesley Wilson**, EQAR Executive Board

Rapporteur: **Gertie De Fraeye**, EQAR Register Committee

The overarching objective of the parallel sessions is to develop strategies to enhance the impact and relevance of EQAR. Each session addresses one main strand of EQAR's wider objectives formulated in the EQAR Mission Statement and the E4 Group Report to the London Summit.

The main questions for all parallel session are: What should be strategic goals for EQAR in relation to the wider objectives? Which measures and activities are necessary from EQAR and other actors to achieve these goals? How can EQAR acquire sufficient resources to implement these activities?

The themes, specific guiding questions and a summary of background information for this session are set out in the following.

Themes

- Prevent accreditation mills from gaining credibility

- Improve the quality of QA agencies and enhance mutual trust between them

- Enhance trust and confidence in the European dimension in QA

Guiding Questions

- How to enhance the trust in and support of the European dimension in quality assurance?

- How to address the tension between EQAR as accountability-driven tool and the ESG as (originally) development-oriented document?

- In the light of the existing trust in EQAR's processes and the future publication of full decisions, would it reasonable to no longer have BFUG observers on the Register Committee?

- Should EQAR monitor the registered QAAs' activities more systematically between the 5-yearly external reviews?

- How useful is the Complaints Policy (adopted in 2011) regarded?

- What could EQAR do to increase the reputation/status dimension of registration? Would a seal (= a special graphical representation for use by registered agencies, based on the EQAR logo) be useful?

- Should EQAR get active in relation to the accreditation and diploma mill problem beyond publishing the Register as a white list? If so, what activities would be useful and feasible?

- What other steps are necessary to enhance trust and confidence in EQAR as a reliable list of trustworthy agencies?

EQAR Mission and Objectives

London Communiqué:

"[…] 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, […]"

EQAR Mission Statement:

- "increasing transparency of quality assurance, and thus enhancing trust and confidence in European higher education."

- "to provide clear reliable information on quality assurance provision in Europe, thus improving trust among agencies."

- "to reduce opportunities for 'accreditation mills' to gain credibility in Europe, thus further enhancing […] confidence […] in the quality of higher education provision in Europe."

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

Purpose and Objectives from E4 Report:

- "providing a basis for the increase of trust among higher education institutions"

- "reduce opportunities for dubious organisations or 'accreditation mills' to gain credibility"

- "serve as an instrument to improve the quality of quality assurance agencies and to promote mutual trust amongst them."

Key Findings of the External Evaluation Report

8.8:   The successful operation of the Register Committee is critical to the effectiveness and credibility of EQAR. […] 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 […] 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 […].

BFUG Observers

8.15:   [The] 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.

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.

8.24:   [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; 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.

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.

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.

Parallel Session 3:

Recognition

Chair: **Jacob Fuchs**, Ministry of Research, Innovation and Higher Education, Denmark

Rapporteur: **Henrik Toft Jensen**, EQAR Register Committee

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The main questions for all parallel session are: What should be strategic goals for EQAR in relation to the wider objectives? Which measures and activities are necessary from EQAR and other actors to achieve these goals? How can EQAR acquire sufficient resources to implement these activities?

The themes, specific guiding questions and a summary of background information for this session are set out in the following.

Themes

- Achieve recognition of registered QAAs' decisions
- Recognition of qualifications
- Recognition of QA of joint degrees
- Allow HEIs to choose a QAA

Guiding Questions

- What are the dimensions of recognition:
    - Freedom of choice for HEIs of their QAA
    - Automatic recognition of accredited degrees/qualifications
    - Recognition of QA decisions on joint/double degrees
    - What other dimensions exist?
- What lessons can be learned from the existing examples of recognition of EQAR-registered agencies?
- What are the main obstacles that prevent governments (and other competent bodies) from recognising EQAR-registered agencies and their decisions?
- What are the main rationales for governments to consider:

- letting their higher education institutions choose any QAA from the register?

- recognising accreditation/QA decisions on joint/double degrees?

- What are HE institutions' motivations for seeking accreditation/being evaluated by EQAR-registered foreign agencies?

- Is it possible to find an agreement that qualifications that were subject to external QA by an EQAR-registered agency, as a rule, have no substantial difference in terms of quality?

- Have other governments considered making it obligatory (by law, ...) for their national QAA to become registered?

EQAR Mission and Objectives

London Communiqué:

"[The register] will therefore [...] facilitate the mutual recognition of quality assurance and accreditation decisions."

EQAR Mission Statement:

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

Purpose and Objectives from E4 Report:

- "promote student mobility by providing a basis for the increase of trust among higher education institutions"

- "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"

Key Findings of the External Evaluation Report

8.21:   [...] 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.

8.22:   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.

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.

Overview of Countries Recognising EQAR-registered Agencies

Austria: A law to reorganise the external quality assurance system for higher education was passed by the Austrian national parliament in July 2011. The three existing external quality assurance agencies of Austria will be merged into one organisation, the new Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQAA).

Under the new legislation, public universities in Austria will have to have their internal quality assurance system certified in a periodic external audit. For these audits, universities will be free to choose any EQAR-registered agency. Universities of applied sciences () will also benefit from this freedom once they have been accredited by AQAA for two six-year terms.

Denmark: Erasmus Mundus joint programmes offered by Danish and foreign institutions in cooperation do not require accreditation by the Danish national quality assurance agency if they are accredited by any EQAR-registered agency.

Danish institutions may only issue Danish diplomas for programmes offered abroad if these programmes are accredited either by the national Danish agency or an "internationally recognised" agency. EQAR-registered agencies are automatically considered "internationally recognised"; other agencies have to prove this in an individual procedure.

The Accreditation Institution, one of Denmark's national QA agencies, is also required by law to seek registration on EQAR.

Germany: Higher education institutions (HEIs) in Germany can turn to several QA agencies that are accredited by a national regulatory body, the German Accreditation Council, for periodic accreditation of their study programmes or at system level. These agencies can ratify individual decisions of other agencies on the accreditation of a joint programme between a German and foreign institution, if the other agency is registered on EQAR or a full member of ENQA.

Liechtenstein: Being a small country, Liechtenstein has decided not to establish its own national agency for only one institution. Instead, the ministry of higher education will license (foreign) quality assurance agencies to carry out (periodic) accreditation. The ministry has announced that it will adopt a bye-law licensing all EQAR-registered agencies.

Lithuania: Lithuanian HEIs are subject to accreditation at institutional and programme level. While HEIs can opt for an external review conducted by any EQAR-registered QA agency, the accreditation decision remains responsibility of the national QA agency.

Romania: All HEIs in Romania are subject to (initial) accreditation by the national QA agency, ARACIS. Once the HEI is accredited it is obliged to undergo periodic external evaluations. For these evaluations, HEIs can choose freely from amongst the registered agencies.

ARACIS is required by law to seek registration on EQAR.