

Complaints Policy

(concerning registered quality assurance agencies¹)

Register Committee
23/24 January 2015

Ref. RC/10.1

Ver. 3.0

Date 2015-02-05

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The European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) maintains a Register of quality assurance agencies that comply substantially with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).

Agencies evidence compliance with the ESG through an independent external review process. Inclusion on the Register is voluntary for quality assurance agencies.

Individuals or organisations that have substantiated concerns about a registered agency's compliance with the ESG or the external review process may bring those to EQAR's attention in line with this Complaints Policy.

Principles

A complaint will only be considered as an official complaint in the sense of §7.2 of the EQAR Procedures for Applications if it is credible, substantiated and supported by appropriate evidence, references, examples etc.

EQAR will only consider complaints that are related to:

- a registered agency's substantial compliance with the ESG, or
- the integrity of the external review process on the basis of which EQAR admitted an agency to the Register.

EQAR does not have a mandate to:

- review individual processes or decisions of registered agencies concerning a particular higher education institution or programme;
- construe national legislation, European Union law, or any other applicable rules. Concerns as regards compliance with such rules should be addressed to the competent courts or authorities.

Submitting a Complaint

Complaints have to be submitted to the EQAR Secretariat in writing by email, fax, regular mail or using the [on-line form](#).

At the complainant's request EQAR shall not disclose their identity to the agency concerned or any other third party. Complaints may also be made anonymously (via the on-line form only).

¹ In case of concerns about the professional conduct of EQAR and its representatives please refer to the [Code of Conduct](#). If you are a quality assurance agency and have a concern regarding the decision on your application please refer to the [Appeals Procedure](#).

EQAR will acknowledge receipt of complaints (except anonymous ones). EQAR reserves the right to ignore submissions that are bogus or obviously unsubstantiated.

Format

Complaints have to be clearly addressed to EQAR, bulk messages will be ignored. Unless made anonymously, the complaint should include the complainant's identity, contact information and a statement whether the complainant's identity may be disclosed to the agency concerned.

Complaints have to include at least:

- The name of the agency concerned.
- The complainant's concerns with regard to the agency's compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) or the integrity of the external review process.

Whenever possible, complainants should refer to specific standards or guidelines of the ESG, or to specific articles of EQAR's Procedures for Application.

- Evidence supporting the concerns (any documents should be attached in plain text or PDF format).
- A statement whether the issue has been taken up with the agency concerned; if so, with what result; if not, for what reason.
- Information on any current or past relationship the complainant has/had with the agency concerned.

Process

The following process is used to handle complaints:

1. The EQAR Secretariat verifies whether the complaint is in line with the present Policy. If the complaint:
 - a. is formally admissible, continue to step 2;
 - b. is bogus, it will be discarded; the agency will be informed of the fact that a complaint was received and discarded;
 - c. is incomplete, the Secretariat asks the complainant to resolve the issue, if feasible (e.g. ask for evidence, clarify relationship with the agency, etc.);
 - d. is/remains not in line with the Policy, it will be discarded and the agency will be informed.
2. The Secretariat appoints two Register Committee members as rapporteurs for the complaint. Rapporteurs analyse whether there is evidence that the agency violated the requirements of the ESG in the specific case and whether the specific case is prima facie evidence for a systemic problem in terms of ESG compliance.

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3. The agency concerned is informed of the complaint and invited to comment; if necessary, clarification or information is requested from the agency.
4. Based on a recommendation by the rapporteurs, the Register Committee decides to either:
 - a. reject the complaint, if it is not substantiated;
 - b. issue a formal warning, if the complaint is substantiated but relates to an isolated case and does not substantially affect the agency's substantial compliance with the ESG;
 - c. reduce the remaining registration period (§7.4 c of the Procedures), if the complaint is substantiated and leads to serious concerns about the agency's substantial compliance with the ESG, while it is impossible to make a final judgement without a new external review of the agency;
 - d. exclude the agency (§7.4 b), if the complaint is substantiated and the agency is evidently no longer in substantial compliance with the ESG.
5. In cases 4.c and d, according to §7.5 of the Procedures the agency is invited to make representation before a final decision is made.
6. The final decision is communicated to the agency, the complainant and published.
 - a. In case 4.a the published decision will not identify the agency.
 - b. In cases 4.b, c and d the agency has the right to appeal.

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Disclaimer and Further Information

This Complaints Policy is solely designed to provide guidelines within EQAR for purposes of reviewing complaints. It may not be relied upon in any manner by any other person or for any other purpose.

The European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) can be found at:

<http://www.eqar.eu/application/requirements/esg.html>

The EQAR Procedures for Applications can be found at:

<http://www.eqar.eu/application/requirements/procedures.pdf>

If you have any questions with regard to the Complaints Policy please do not hesitate to contact the [EQAR Secretariat](#).