

EQAR Members' Dialogue

17/18 October 2013

Ghent

Venue:

Monasterium PoortAckere

Oude Houtlei 56, 9000 Gent, Belgium

Hosted by the:

Flemish Department of Education and Training

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Objectives

The Members' Dialogue brings together EQAR Governmental Members, stakeholder organisations, permanent observers and statutory bodies to discuss recent policy developments in quality assurance.

EQAR's Strategic Plan 2013-2017¹ defines two strategic goals:

1. International Trust and Recognition of Registered Quality Assurance Agencies Across Europe
2. Enhanced Transparency and Information Provision

Focussing on these priority goals, participants will be invited to discuss relevant developments in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), achievements thus far, as well as further steps and activities towards realising EQAR's strategic goals.

Participants

Approximately 65 participants, including representatives of:

- Governmental Members (31 ministries)
- Stakeholder Members (ENQA, ESU, EUA, EURASHE; BUSINESSEUROPE, Education International)
- Permanent observers (Council of Europe, UNESCO, European Commission, Bologna Secretariat)
- EQAR statutory bodies (Executive Board, Register Committee, Appeals Committee, Secretariat)

¹ Adopted by the General Assembly on 21 March 2013, see http://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/eqar/information/EQAR_AR12_screen.pdf

Thursday 17 October 2013

9:30 Opening Session

Welcome and introduction to the meeting agenda, by:

Noël Vercruysse, Department of Education and Training

Maria Kelo, President of the Executive Board, EQAR

10:00 Keynote presentations

Chair: **Maria Kelo**, President of the Executive Board, EQAR

Cross-Border Quality Audit – an Example from Practice

Speakers: **Peter Riedler**, Vice-Rector, University of Graz (Austria) and

Helka Kekäläinen, Secretary General, Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC)

Quality Assurance as a Basis for Automatic Recognition

Speaker: **Raf Devos**, Deputy Director of the Cabinet of the Minister for Education, Youth, Equal Opportunities and Brussels Affairs, Flemish Government

11:30 Coffee break

12:00 Keynote presentation

European Commission Initiatives in Quality Assurance and Presentation of the Progress Report

Speaker: **Adam Tyson**, Head of Higher Education Unit, DG Education and Culture, European Commission

13:00 Lunch

14:00 Keynote presentations:

Chair: **Eric Froment**, Register Committee Chair, EQAR

An International Perspective – What can Europe Learn from the Debates on the Future of Accreditation in the USA?

Speaker: **Sylvia Manning**, President, Higher Learning Commission (HLC), North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA) & Advisory Group for the EQAR Analysis on Recognition

15:00 Intermediate Results of the Analysis on Recognition

Speaker: **Melinda Szabó**, Project Officer, EQAR

- 15:45** Knowledge Café Session
- Legislative Frameworks for External Quality Assurance by EQAR-Registered Agencies**
- Representatives of countries that allow foreign EQAR-registered agencies to operate and recognise their decisions are invited to prepare either a poster presentation or are asked to be available to present very briefly what regulations they put in place, why, what are their experiences; presenters are seated at different tables and participants circulate from one to another.
- (Coffee served during the session.)
- 16:30** **Parallel sessions** – topic I (see below)
- 18:00** Day ends

Friday 18 October 2013

- 9:30** **Parallel sessions** – topic II (see below)
- 11:00** Coffee break
- 11:30** Plenary session:
- Main Messages from Parallel Sessions**
- By: Session chairs
- Wrap Up, Conclusions and Next Steps**
- Chair: Colin Tück, Director, EQAR
- (plenary discussion followed by concluding remarks)
- 13:00** Lunch and departure

Knowledge Café:

Legislative Frameworks for External Quality Assurance by EQAR-registered Agencies

Format

The session allows participants to gain insight into the frameworks and experiences of countries allowing their higher education institutions to be accredited/evaluated/audited by foreign, EQAR-registered agencies.

The Knowledge Café format enables participants to get to know a number of country examples in a short time and an informal setting (like during a conversation at an exhibition stand or in a coffee break).

Representatives of the case study countries will be seated at different tables and participants are asked to join one of the tables initially. Every 10 minutes, participants are asked to join another table. (Of course, participants can remain at a table if they wish to gain deeper understanding of one system.)

Representatives of the case study countries are asked to:

- **Introduce their legislative framework and experience** with accreditation/ audit/ evaluation by foreign QA agencies very briefly (in **ca. 2 – 3 minutes**).
- **Take questions** from the participants at their table after the short introduction and **moderate the discussion**.
- Invite participants to move on to another table after 10 minutes, and welcome new participants.
- There is **no possibility of a power point presentation**, but representatives **may bring along a poster or other material**.

The whole **session will include 4 – 5 rounds**. Representatives are thus kindly asked to repeat their brief introduction and to take questions from 4 – 5 changing groups at their table.

Case-study countries

Austria

In July 2011 the Austrian parliament passed a law to re-organise the external quality assurance system for higher education. In the new system, public universities in Austria 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 option once they have been accredited by the Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance (AQA) for two six-year terms.

Andreas Neuhold, Federal Ministry of Science and Research

Belgium – Flemish Community

Higher education institutions in the Flemish Community of Belgium can choose to have their accreditation review carried out by foreign EQAR-registered agencies. In Flanders, such reviews will be the basis for a second accreditation of study programmes by the NVAO. All EQAR-registered agencies are automatically entitled to carry out the assessment reviews. While they do not have to be included on a special list or register, agencies will have to agree the Terms of Reference with NVAO.

Nina Mares, Flemish Department of Education and Training

Denmark

Automatic recognition of accreditation can be done by EQAR-registered agencies for Erasmus Mundus joint programmes and for Danish diplomas offered abroad. 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. If an agency is registered on EQAR, it is automatically considered “internationally recognised”; otherwise, it has to prove this in an individual procedure to the Danish authorities. The Accreditation Institution, one of Denmark’s national QA agencies, is also required by law to seek registration on EQAR.

Jette Skovbjerg, Ministry of Science, Innovation and Higher Education

Kazakhstan

Institutions are subject to periodic institutional and programme accreditation. They can have their programmes accredited by any quality assurance agency listed on the Kazakh national register of accreditation bodies. Quality assurance agencies from other countries in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) can be included on the national register of agencies subject to the condition that they are EQAR-registered.

Moreover, both Kazakh and foreign agencies on the national register will not need to undergo a review by the Kazakh authorities if they are registered on EQAR, since registration guarantees that agencies periodically re-evidence their substantial compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) through an external review every five years.

Rimma Seidakhmetova, Ministry of Education and Science

Lithuania

Lithuanian HEIs are subject to regular accreditation at both institutional and programme level. For programme accreditation, HEIs can opt for an external review conducted by any EQAR-registered QA agency. The actual accreditation decision, however, remains the responsibility of the national QA agency.

Birute Miskiniene, Ministry of Education and Science

Liechtenstein

Liechtenstein legislation requires the higher education institution to seek accreditation by any EQAR-registered agency. The country has decided not to establish an own national agency.

Eva-Maria Schädler, Office of Education

Poland

Polish HEIs may request foreign EQAR-registered QA agencies to conduct an external accreditation review, whereas the accreditation decision is taken by the Polish Accreditation Commission (PKA, the national agency). HEIs are further required to be reviewed by an EQAR-registered agency in order to apply for the right to offer doctorate degrees. Foreign higher education institutions (HEIs) that have been accredited by any EQAR-registered agency have the right to establish branch HEIs or departments in Polish.

Bartek Banaszak, Ministry of Science and Higher Education

Parallel Sessions

Within each of the three tracks, two specific topics will be addressed. The topics of the parallel sessions relate to the strategic goals and activities set out in the EQAR Strategic Plan 2013 – 2017.

The overarching questions for all parallel session are:

- What are the latest policy developments? Are they in line with EQAR's strategic goals?
- What are the main obstacles that prevent policy developments in the direction of EQAR's strategic goals?
- What specific steps can EQAR take? What is the relation between EQAR and other players in pursuing its strategic goals?

Tracks and Theme

There are three main tracks with two specific themes each. Each block of parallel sessions will be devoted to one theme:

Track 1: Trust and Recognition of Registered QAA's

- I. Conclusions and lessons learnt from the analysis on recognition of registered agencies
- II. Quality assurance of joint programmes and the proposed European approach

Track 2: Recognition of Qualifications based on QA

- I. How the ESG and EQAR could support automatic recognition
- II. New EU Directive on professional recognition – lessons for QA in HE and academic recognition

Track 3: Transparency and Information

- I. Information provided on registered agencies and on “quality assured” HEI's and programmes
- II. Practices and Interpretations by the Register Committee – presentation of the new public document

Track 1:

Trust and Recognition of Registered QAAs

Chair: Tia Loukkola, European University Association (EUA)

Related Elements from Strategic Plan

Strategic Goal 1: International Trust and Recognition of Registered Quality Assurance Agencies Across Europe

In line with national requirements all EQAR-registered agencies and their decisions are officially recognised by all EHEA countries and in the context of relevant European initiatives, and all EHEA countries allow higher education institutions to request evaluation, audit or accreditation by any registered agency to fulfil their formal external quality assurance obligations.

Activities

- Carry out an in-depth analysis of both legal provisions in EHEA countries recognising EQAR-registered QA agencies and their decisions, and the use made of such provisions by HE institutions/programmes. Organise activities enabling institutions to inform themselves about the existing possibilities, different QA agencies, their methodologies and profiles.
- Organise peer-learning seminars on the possibilities, benefits and challenges linked to the recognition of EQAR-registered agencies.
- Ensure that the revision of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) takes account of their importance in underpinning trust in EQAR-registered agencies and thus in increasing the willingness of public authorities to recognise registered agencies in their systems, and ensure that the specific challenges of cross-border quality assurance activities are considered.
- Promote recognition of EQAR-registered agencies' decisions as a way to facilitate the external quality assurance process for joint programmes and cross-border higher education provision.

Theme 1: Conclusions and lessons learnt from the analysis

Facilitator: Melinda Szabo, EQAR Secretariat

The session will allow participants to follow up in greater detail the intermediate results of the analysis on the recognition of registered agencies. It continues the plenary session just before.

Guiding Questions

- What are the good practice examples with regard to national legislation allowing foreign EQAR-registered QAAs to operate?
- What are the concerns or reservations of countries that are not open to the activity of foreign EQAR-registered QAAs and how can they be addressed?
- Are there any lessons to be learnt for EQAR's official policies and procedures, or other activities?
- What steps could be taken at European policy level to promote the recognition of EQAR-registered QAAs?

Theme 2: QA of joint programmes and proposed European approach

Facilitator: Mark Frederiks, BFUG Ad-hoc Expert Group

Quality assurance of joint programmes and joint degrees has been a major challenge, due to the sometimes conflicting national requirements and criteria across the EHEA. A small ad-hoc expert group, commissioned by the BFUG, is preparing a proposal for a European accreditation/QA approach, aiming to address the existing obstacles and to enable single QA procedures.

Guiding Questions

- What difficulties have countries encountered and how have they addressed them so far?
- Is a European approach a good way forward, and how should it balance the need to be a clear basis for trust and recognition, while at the same time being sufficiently flexible to fit all EHEA countries?
- Are countries ready to recognise accreditation decisions on joint degrees that are made by EQAR-registered QAA's based on an agreed European approach?
- What steps will be needed to promote the European approach and ensure that it will be widely applied by QAA's?

Background information

Bucharest Communiqué (April 2012)

“Quality assurance is essential for building trust and to reinforce the attractiveness of the EHEA's offerings, including in the provision of cross-border education. [...] We welcome the external evaluation of EQAR and we encourage quality assurance agencies to apply for registration. We will allow EQAR-registered agencies to perform their activities across the EHEA, while complying with national requirements. In particular, we will aim to recognise quality assurance decisions of EQAR-registered agencies on joint and double degree programmes.” (page 2)

Track 2:

Recognition of Qualifications Based on QA

Chair: **Ivana Krznar**, Ministry of Science, Education and Sports,
Croatia

Related Elements from Strategic Plan

Strategic Goal 1: International Trust and Recognition of Registered Quality Assurance Agencies Across Europe

In line with national requirements all EQAR-registered agencies and their decisions are officially recognised by all EHEA countries and in the context of relevant European initiatives, and all EHEA countries allow higher education institutions to request evaluation, audit or accreditation by any registered agency to fulfil their formal external quality assurance obligations.

Activities

- Ensure that the revision of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) takes account of their importance in underpinning trust in EQAR-registered agencies and thus in increasing the willingness of public authorities to recognise registered agencies in their systems, and ensure that the specific challenges of cross-border quality assurance activities are considered.
- Promote the benefits of EQAR registration and thus the broader recognition of QA agencies' decisions in relation to the academic and professional recognition of qualifications.
- Promote recognition of EQAR-registered agencies' decisions as a way to facilitate the external quality assurance process for joint programmes and cross-border higher education provision.

Theme 1: How ESG and EQAR could support automatic recognition

Facilitator: **Noël Vercruysse**, Department of Education and Training, Flemish Community of Belgium, member of the “Pathfinder Group”

Ministers agreed that “automatic recognition” – based on the Bologna tools, thus, amongst others, on QA – is a long-term goal for the EHEA. One example of how automatic recognition might look like is a new law in the Flemish Community of Belgium, recognising foreign degrees based on qualifications frameworks and quality assurance by EQAR-registered QA agencies.

Guiding Questions

- What are the existing examples of more automatic or system-level approaches to recognition?
- How do they make use of quality assurance, the ESG and EQAR?
- Are their lessons for the revision of the ESG in terms of ensuring that they can serve as a basis for creating necessary trust for recognition?
- What activities can EQAR do in order to ensure that quality assurance benefits recognition of qualifications?

Theme 2: New EU Directive on professional recognition

Facilitator: **Howard Davies**, Senior Adviser, EUA

The EU is about to adopt a revised directive on recognition of professional qualifications (i.e. in the regulated professions). While there are certain links to the Bologna Process and its related tools (including ECTS and the EQF-LLL), the draft revised directive largely relies on its own concepts and approaches. At the same time, there might be some elements and experiences of interest for HE.

Guiding Questions

- What are good practices from the world of professional recognition that might be relevant examples or role models for academic recognition?
- What is the role of quality assurance in professional recognition? Could EQAR have any role in that field?
- What are developments in relation to sector-specific QA networks or initiatives? Is there interest in EQAR and how can EQAR reach out to those players?

Background information

Bucharest Communiqué (April 2012)

“We are determined to remove outstanding obstacles hindering effective and proper recognition and are willing to work together towards the automatic recognition of comparable academic degrees, building on the tools of the Bologna framework, as a long-term goal of the EHEA. We therefore commit to reviewing our national legislation to comply with the Lisbon Recognition Convention. We welcome the European Area of Recognition (EAR) Manual and recommend its use as a set of guidelines for recognition of foreign qualifications and a compendium of good practices, as well as encourage higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies to assess institutional recognition procedures in internal and external quality assurance.”

Track 3:

Transparency and Information

Chair: Allan Päll, Executive Board, EQAR

Related Elements from Strategic Plan

Strategic Goal 2: Enhanced Transparency and Information Provision

EQAR operates transparently, responds to the expectations of its key target groups and provides information that is useful to them.

Activities

- Publish all decisions made by the Register Committee on applications for inclusion on the Register, including their reasons.
- Review EQAR's information policy towards different target groups (governments, agencies, institutions, students), in particular:
 - Enhance the information provided on registered QA agencies and their activities.
 - Explore the feasibility of a database of evaluated and accredited institutions and programmes, linking with existing initiatives where possible.
- Promote more visible causality between the work of EQAR, QA agencies, institutions and their programmes through EQAR's contribution to the future development of the ESG and their use.
- Promote the shared principles for QA reflected in EQAR's criteria (the ESG) within the EHEA and internationally.

Theme 1: Information provided on registered agencies

Facilitator: Colin Tück, Director, EQAR

In order to make the information on registered agencies, where they operate, and the information on recognition of foreign, EQAR-registered in different countries more easily accessible, an interactive map has been made available on the EQAR website. A consultation on an update of the "fact sheets" available for each registered agency is currently underway. Mutual links have been introduced between EQAR and Crossroads, a central database of "quality assured" higher education (i.e. decisions and reports of participating agencies).

Guiding Questions

- Is the interactive map clear and accessible? Is the information provided per country useful?
- Is the proposed update of information on registered agencies relevant for the different target groups?
- Are their additional information needs (of governments, HEI's, recognition bodies, QAA's or students) that would be feasible to satisfy by EQAR?
- Is it a functional and efficient way to link to data available in Crossroads? How should EQAR approach agencies whose decisions/reports are not part of any existing central database?

Theme 2: Practices and Interpretations by the Register Committee

Facilitator: **Lucien Bollaert**, Vice-Chair of the Register Committee, EQAR

Since 2013, the Register Committee's decisions have been published in full. Furthermore, the Register Committee has prepared a public document summarising its practices and interpretations made in using the ESG as criteria for inclusion on the Register.

Guiding Questions

- Are the published decisions clear and understandable? Is the document "Practices and Interpretations" helpful in understanding both individual decisions as well as the decision-making practice in general?
- Is the way in which decisions are published on the EQAR website appropriate?
- What additional information could be made available to increase transparency of the decision-making process on registration?
- What lessons are to be learnt for the revision of the ESG from the practices and interpretations in relation to the current ESG?

Background information

Bucharest Communiqué (April 2012)

"We will revise the ESG to improve their clarity, applicability and usefulness, including their scope. The revision will be based upon an initial proposal to be prepared by the E4 in cooperation with Education International, BUSINESSEUROPE and the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), which will be submitted to the Bologna Follow-Up Group".