Database of External Quality Assurance Results

Report and Operational Model

presented to the EQAR Members' Dialogue 2016

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Executive Summary

Exploring the possibility of a database of evaluated and accredited higher education institutions and programmes has been part of EQAR's Strategic Plan since 2013 In the course of 2016, EQAR surveyed potential users of such a database, in order to analyse the need and benefits, as well as registered agencies, in order to analyse the feasibility.

EQAR received feedback from over 350 potential users. Recognition information centres (ENIC-NARICs) and recognition officers in higher education institutions access external QA results most frequently, followed by ministries, other national authorities, higher education institutions in general, students and quality assurance agencies.

Most respondents consider that information on external quality assurance (QA) is currently "somewhat accessible". The main difficulties reported relate to finding information on different QA agencies' websites, which vary in structure and user-friendliness, reports published in different languages, and understanding the status and meaning of external QA decisions and reports.

The existing information tools and databases of external QA results are either national, or the quality assurance-related information is limited and patchy, without access to external QA reports. A European database of external QA results officially recognised as in line with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG) does currently not exist.

Potential users – Including those who currently have few difficulties in accessing external QA results – would find a central database of external QA results useful. Such a database could enhance accessibility of external QA results (decisions and reports), and help users understand them through contextual information on the country's external QA system and basic information on the external QA procedure, e.g. its status and the formal decision resulting, if any. Since the language of reports will vary, it would be crucial to provide contextual information always in English, so that users could gain a general understanding even if unable to read the full report.

Given the diverse (national) external QA systems across the EHEA, the starting point for the database should be the institution, so as to represent higher education institutions in a comparable and fair way. At present, it would not be feasible to establish a list of study programmes offered by those institutions with an institutional accreditation/evaluation/audit.

The user would be able to find out whether the institution was subject to external QA in line with the ESG (at institutional level, or one or more of its programmes). The database would provide information on the external QA procedures and access to the corresponding

report(s), addressing the institution's or programme's quality or how it is managed, by its internal quality assurance system.

Next to searching or browsing the database on the web, users would also be able to download the full data, including the full historic record. Registered agencies and other organisations would further be able to embed the database in their own websites or applications.

The main risks and challenges are related to keeping the information up-to-date and accurate, ensuring the database's relevance as well as its long-term sustainability.

In order to ensure consistency and reliability, the operational model is built on using a reference list of higher education institutions, managed by EQAR and including basic information, based on an existing source. Registered agencies would then need to provide information on their external QA results.

Ideally, registered agencies would upload that information automatically and in a standardised format. A link with existing databases already including information on external QA from several agencies could be realised. Alternatively, agencies could provide the information manually through a web interface.

A net staff increase by 50% full-time equivalent (FTE) would be needed for EQAR to adequately maintain the database on an ongoing basis. While most information on external QA results should come into the database without a need for manual intervention by EQAR, the database system would perform a number of sanity checks to trigger manual intervention where necessary and thus to ensure data quality.

1. Introduction

Over the past years, there have been demands for EQAR to provide a list or a database of evaluated and accredited higher education institutions and programmes, and to provide direct, central access to agencies' reports. Exploring the development of such a database or repository of information on external quality assurance (QA) procedures, reports and decisions is part of EQAR's Strategic Plan 2013-2017:

"Review EQAR's information policy towards different target groups (governments, agencies, institutions, students), in particular: [...] Explore the feasibility of a database of evaluated and accredited institutions and programmes, linking with existing initiatives where possible."

The 2016 Self-Evaluation Report contains the recommendation to develop the specifications for such a database, in close consultation with relevant stakeholders, and to consider its possible costs. Consequently, in its Work Plan 2016/17 EQAR committed to:

"Prepare a study and operational proposal, including:

1. Assessment of needs, benefits and risks

2. Analysis of existing similar initiatives

3. Specifications, design proposal

4. Estimation of one-off implementation and long-term costs"

Consequently, the EQAR Secretariat studied the feasibility of a database of quality-assured higher education institutions and programmes in the course of 2016. The results are presented in this report in order to inform a decision by EQAR members as to whether and how to proceed with establishing such a database.

The present report addresses the following key questions:

• What is the current need for such a database? What are the main benefits brought by a database of external QA results? (chapter 2)

• What databases and information tools already exist? How would EQAR's database complement these existing national/international databases? (chapter 3)

• Would it be feasible to establish a database of external QA results of EQAR-registered agencies? What are the main challenges and risks associated with implementing and maintaining such a database? (chapter 4)

• How could the database be implemented and maintained practically? What costs would be incurred? (chapter 5)

2. Need and benefits

2.1 Rationale

EQAR's mission is to enhance trust and confidence in European higher education by increasing the transparency of quality assurance, and providing clear and reliable information on quality assurance provision in Europe.

EQAR's website currently provides the up-to-date list of EQAR-registered agencies, with basic information on their work, statistics of their external quality assurance activities, and an overview of European Higher Education Area (EHEA) countries' national requirements and regulations for external quality assurance.

All EQAR-registered QA agencies are required, as set out in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG), to publish the full reports of their external quality assurance activities. While there are various dimensions to transparency of external quality assurance, the accessibility of the published reports is one important aspect.

Currently, EQAR facilitates access to those reports indirectly: users can find on EQAR's website information on registered agencies operating in a certain country, and then have to consult those agencies' websites one-by-one for information and the external quality assurance report on a specific higher education institution. Given that agencies' website differ in their structure and user-friendliness, this can be a time-consuming task especially for non-specialist users.

A central database, as explored in this report, could improve the accessibility of such information to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals, and thus contribute to enhancing the transparency of external QA.

Better accessibility of external QA results is also instrumental for the (automatic) recognition of qualifications, as higher education institutions and employers need an efficient way to establish whether a higher education institution was subject to external QA in line with the ESG. The database could thus also serve EQAR's objective to facilitate and promote the recognition of degrees and mobility of students.

2.2 Basic concept

For the purpose of the surveys carried out and the present report, the main objective/functionality of the database was defined as allowing users to easily identify whether a specific higher education institution, or its programmes, were evaluated, accredited or audited in line with the ESG, by an EQAR-registered agency. Where the following text refers to "the database", it refers to a database along this basic concept.

The database would facilitate the access to information and reports on external QA, and thus serve as a reliable information source on higher education institutions' quality or how it is managed, by their internal quality assurance system.

Considering the diversity of the legal frameworks for the external QA of higher education across Europe – i.e. including systems relying exclusively on institutional or programme evaluation or accreditation, or combinations of the two – users are also faced with the challenge of making sense and navigating such complex set of information. The database would connect the existing information already collected by EQAR on the quality assurance re-

quirements of different higher education systems with information on and results of the external QA procedures carried out by EQAR-registered agencies.

2.3 Survey of potential users

To investigate in detail the possible needs and benefits of such a database, EQAR carried out a survey addressed to its members and wider network. A total of 385 responses were collected between 20 June and 31 July 2016. The majority of respondents (91%) came from the 48 higher education systems in the EHEA, with 9% of respondents based in 22 other non-EHEA countries or regions.

The biggest share of respondents were higher education institution representatives (42% in total, including higher education leadership, academic and administrative staff as well as
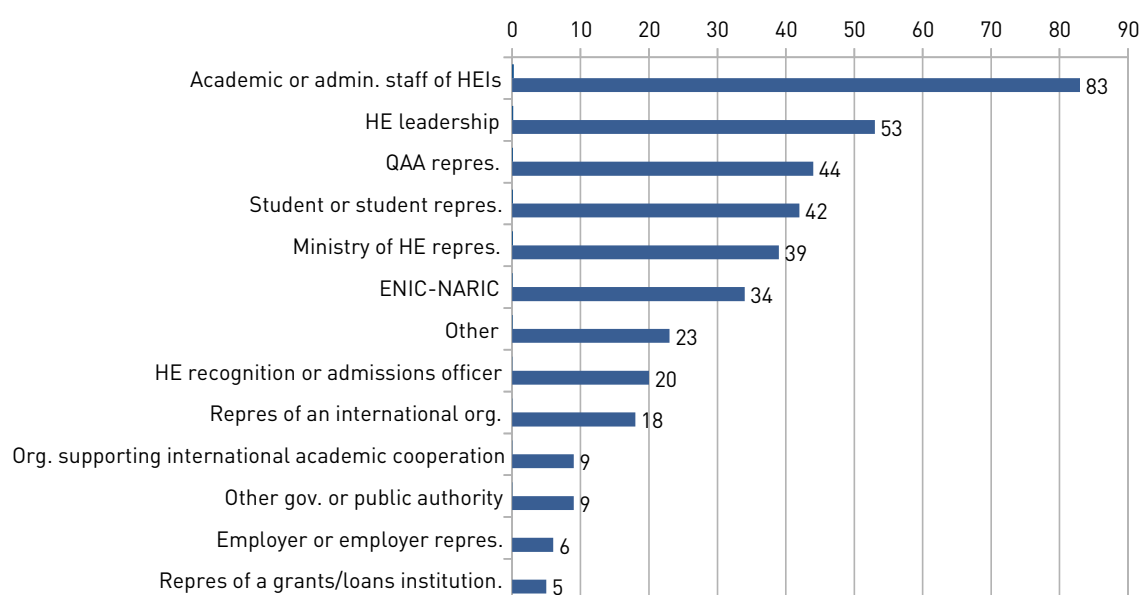
Figure 1: Survey of potential users - profile of respondents (n=385)

recognition or admission officers). 40% of responses were nearly equally distributed (i.e. ca. 10% each) between representatives of ministries for higher education, quality assurance agencies, recognition information centres (ENIC-NARIC) and students.

The remaining answers were provided by employers, international stakeholder organisations, agencies/organisations supporting international academic cooperation, national authorities offering grants and loans as well as other government and public authorities (see Figure 1).

2.4 Users' consultation of external QA results

The survey showed that 42% of respondents consult decisions or reports on the external quality assurance (QA) of higher education institutions or programmes on an at least monthly basis, with a third of them at least once a week (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Users' consultation of external QA results (n=385)
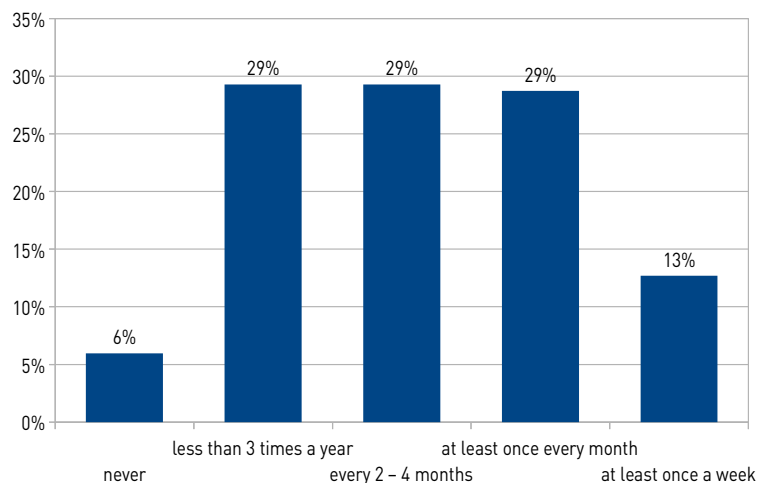
The frequency of consulting decisions or reports on the external QA of higher education institutions or programmes shows slight variations between different groups, with:

- higher frequency among representatives of ENIC-NARICs and higher education institutions' admission and recognition officers (majority of answers distributed between AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK and AT LEAST ONCE A MONTH)

- medium frequency for ministry representatives, national authorities, students and other higher education institutions' representatives (majority of answers distributed between AT LEAST ONCE A MONTH and EVERY 2-4 MONTHS) and

- lower frequency among representatives of international organisations, employers and other groups (majority of answers distributed between EVERY 2-4 MONTHS and 'LESS THAN 3 TIMES A YEAR).

2.5 Current accessibility of external QA results

Most respondents consider that external QA reports or decisions on higher education institutions and programmes are SOMEWHAT ACCESSIBLE (61%), compared to 16% who find them EASILY ACCESSIBLE and 23% of respondents who find them DIFFICULT or NOT ACCESSIBLE. There is no considerable variation between the different user groups.

Unsurprisingly, those respondents who consult decision/reports more frequently find them slightly easier to access. Nevertheless, SOMEWHAT ACCESSIBLE is by far the most frequent response in all groups.

Currently, in order to consult quality assurance information about a specific programme or higher education institution, users have to look up the list of all quality assurance agencies that might have reviewed (a programme of) the institution they are interested in, and then consult all those agencies' websites separately.

Commenting on the different issues encountered in searching for such information respondents[1] mentioned the lack of user-friendly websites, with scattered information, the time consuming aspects of their search, thus making it difficult to make sense of the existing information:

- "Frequently the reports are located in a subsection of a website that is not user-friendly." (Academic or administrative staff of a higher education institution)

- "Sometimes the information is mixed up with many other things and one has to dig deeply to find it out." (Higher education leadership)

- "There is no standardization in publishing such information and the websites are often very complex and not so intuitive." (Student or student representative)

Figure 3: Accessibility of external QA decisions and reports (n=384)

- The search is "time-consuming: it is good to have all the information accessible in the same website." (Representative of an international organisation in higher education)

- "The reports are scattered on the website of the national quality assurance agency and thus quite difficult to find. Moreover, there are at least 3-4 reports/institution, thus making it difficult for a person not working in the field difficult to understand." (Representative of a ministry of higher education)

- "You have to know exactly where to find the information, if you are an outsider and have not been involved in quality assurance, this is very difficult to find. You have to know which part of which website and then the exact path for a specific education." (Representative of a student union)

- "Most of the information is actually accessible but only for those who know where and how to look for it. It is difficult to structure and not easily available for society at the moment. The current national database is newly developed and it includes only information starting from summer 2015. The historical information is stored in three other sources and none of them are publicly available. All sources are available for the agency staff but until the new e-platform is launched they are available to public only by contacting the agency staff. So - in general - for someone from outside it is difficult to understand where to look and whom to contact in order to get exactly the information that the person needs." (Representative of a quality assurance agency)

- "We have access to local reports. Reports from other countries are not easily accessible due to a lack of data centralisation." (Representative of a ministry of higher education)
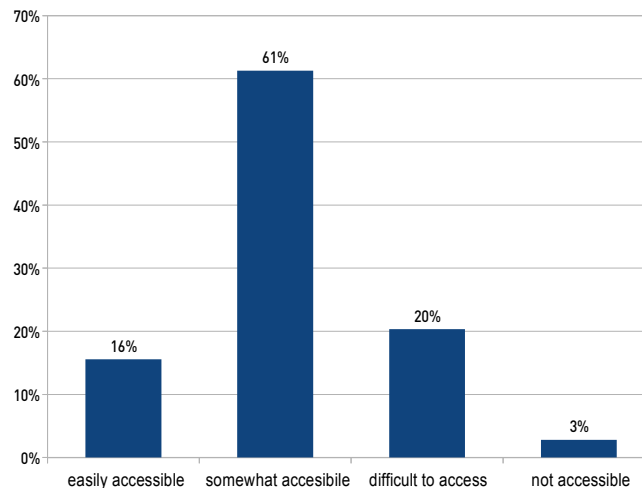
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[1] A total of 80 comments were provided by respondents who answered that access to external quality assurance decisions and reports is difficult or not easily accessible.

The time spent in searching for information related to the quality assurance of a particular institution or programme is met with the challenge of understanding the different external quality assurance systems and legal frameworks across the EHEA.

In France, Poland, Serbia or Romania, for instance, higher education institution are required to undergo external evaluation at both institutional and programme level; in the United Kingdom, Ireland or Austria, for instance, public higher education institutions have to pass an institutional audit only; while in Portugal or the French Community of Belgium the evaluation/accreditation at programme level is sufficient. Some countries are in transition from one approach to another, and yet others allow institutions to choose from different regimes.

It is important to note that the ESG not only allow, but explicitly support such a diversity of approaches. These are therefore to be considered all equally valid and legitimate. Consequently, the database would need to help the user in understanding and navigating the diverse external QA landscape.

24 of the 43 EQAR-registered agencies publish (on their own websites) general information (e.g. the name of the reviewed higher education institution or programme, decision made, experts involved) on all their external QA procedures in English. Additional 10 agencies do so for some external QA procedures (e.g. cross-border QA).

The most common languages at least occasionally used by registered QA agencies for their external QA reports are English (24), German (9), Spanish (7) and French (4). Some EQAR-registered agencies publish their reports in English instead of their local language, whereas others provide abstracts or summary reports in English or another widely spoken language in addition to their local language. 10 EQAR-registered quality assurance agencies publish all their external QA reports in English, and a number of additional agencies publish some reports (e.g. for cross-border QA) in English.

2.6 Usefulness of a database of external QA results

While most respondents find information on external QA results SOMEWHAT ACCESSIBLE, they would find it useful to have a database providing central access to external quality assurance reports and decisions. 76% of respondents find it VERY USEFUL or USEFUL; 19% considered a database SOMEWHAT USEFUL, while only 4.5% found a database NOT USEFUL (see Figure 4). The views on the usefulness do not differ substantially by respondent profile.

It is noteworthy that even among those respondents who answered that external QA reports and decisions are currently easily accessible, the majority find it VERY USEFUL or USEFUL (69%) to have access to such a central database.

Some respondents commented[2] why they welcome a database of trustworthy and reliable information on external QA of higher education institutions and programmes:
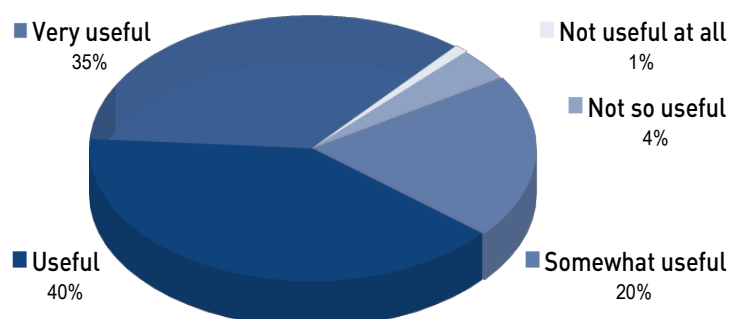
Figure 4: Usefulness of a database of QA results (n=384)

Very useful 35%

Not useful at all 1%

Not so useful 4%

Useful 40%

Somewhat useful 20%

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[2]General comments were submitted as part of the "Any further comments" section of the Survey of Users.

- "Part of national databases are on national language only and sometimes with limited information. Therefore all activities to improve accessibility of trustful information is recommended." (Representative of an ENIC-NARIC office)

- "The main benefit is to be able to pursue briefly whether the university exists at all and what quality it has." (Government or public authority)

- "I am now at some distance from this domain but, based on my recent experience as head of a national QA Agency, I feel that such a data base would be very useful to many actors in Europe and outsider Europe" (former head of a national QA agency)

- Information is "distributed in too many websites, a comprehensive database is necessary which is easy accessible and reliable." (Recognition officer, admission officer of a HEIs)

- "I need to access information about institutions in different countries to verify accreditation of HEI and programme to establish scholarship eligibility. Depending on country information can be hard to find and it is not clear when institutional accreditation is sufficient and where both institution and program must be accredited, what is the accreditation status especially with new institutions (they are on the list, but it is not clear if accreditation is underway or needed or completed etc.), if institution is still accredited (e.g. date of last accreditation might be some years back meaning it can still be valid or not). Due to processes in native language it is not always possible to understand from the documents what is the current status. Special challenge is transnational education and joint programmes that need appropriate accreditation in all countries." (Representative of national authority responsible for scholarship funds).

A few respondents have also commented on the possible challenges faced by the database and have detailed some of their concerns and aspects to be considered in the development of such a database:

- "Although conceptually interesting such a database may be technically very difficult to implement and to curate at EQAR level." (Representative of a ministry of higher education)

- "The logic of the search engine is critical: there should be multiple ways to find the same data from the database." (Student representative)

- "Database should take into account that HE systems are in constant evolution and should therefore take the history of an institution/programme/qualification into account: what if the name changes due to merging operations, renaming of a study programme or adjustments to the national QF?" (Representative of a government or public authority)

- "It is important to note that in many countries programmes are not accredited by an external agency, but through internal institutional procedures. the website must respect this, and not lead an uninformed viewer to the conclusion that some universities do not have any accredited programmes. the weblink to the relevant QA reports is the most important feature of the proposed new database." (Representative of a national university association)

- "Other important elements are in my opinion: - compatibility with the other frequently used databases - mention of how frequently the database is updated, an on the basis of what new information that is available - maps - how to guarantee sustainability and estimate for which period that would be - add a glossary of the specific terminology, and a full list of all mentioned (national and subject-specific) accreditation, review, audit bodies." (Former representative of an international higher education organisation)

- ¨A potential obstacle could be that QA reports are often written in the official (local) language and not translated into English or French. The usefulness of reports written in the official language can be limited and a mere 'yes' or 'no' referring to the formal decision does not always provide meaningful insights and information about an institution or specific programme.¨ (Academic or administrative staff of a higher education institution)

- "ECA has developed Qrossroads several years ago. It is a useful and cost effective tool on which a EQAR database could build. Maintenance, updates, expansion and further development are important challenges for any European database. Duplication should be avoided and forces joined to be able to offer a European database that is both of added value and financially manageable." (Representative of an international organisation)

The comments of potential users point to three important challenges, which the database would need to address in order to maximise its usefulness:

1. In order to help understand the diversity of external QA systems, the database would need to bring together existing information on the external QA systems for higher education in Europe (country profiles currently available on the EQAR website, maintained with the support of the Governmental Members) with information on external QA procedures at particular higher education institutions.

    The metadata will help to contextualise the external QA procedure (e.g. whether it is part of the obligatory national external QA system or comes in addition), especially in cases where there are several external QA reports for a single higher education institution.

2. The database would need to ensure that the different approaches to external QA envisaged by the ESG (evaluation, accreditation or audit, at institutional or programme level) are equally and understandably represented, to both specialist and lay users. This could be accomplished by using the institution as a starting point, and by providing metadata to describe the type of external QA procedure.

3. The database would need to be regularly and promptly updated. Therefore, only a model where information is supplied by registered agencies themselves, preferably automatically, without the need for manual conversion or other intervention by EQAR, seems reasonable.

While the database would not be able to give simple answers to complex questions, it could make access to external QA reports and decisions more efficient. It would provide information on external QA in line with the ESG, addressing institutions' quality or how it is managed, by their internal quality assurance system.

The database would not change the fact that many registered quality assurance agencies publish their external QA reports and decisions in their local language only. The database would provide access to reports and summaries in the language in which they are published. At the same time, basic information on the external QA procedure (metadata such as type, status, formal decision, validity) in English would provide the user a general understanding, even if they are unable to read the full report.

3. Review of existing initiatives

To develop EQAR's own database it is relevant to consider and draw lessons from other existing initiatives. To this aim, existing sources of information that are known to EQAR or were mentioned by survey respondents were examined, with an in-depth analysis given into the most relevant initiatives.
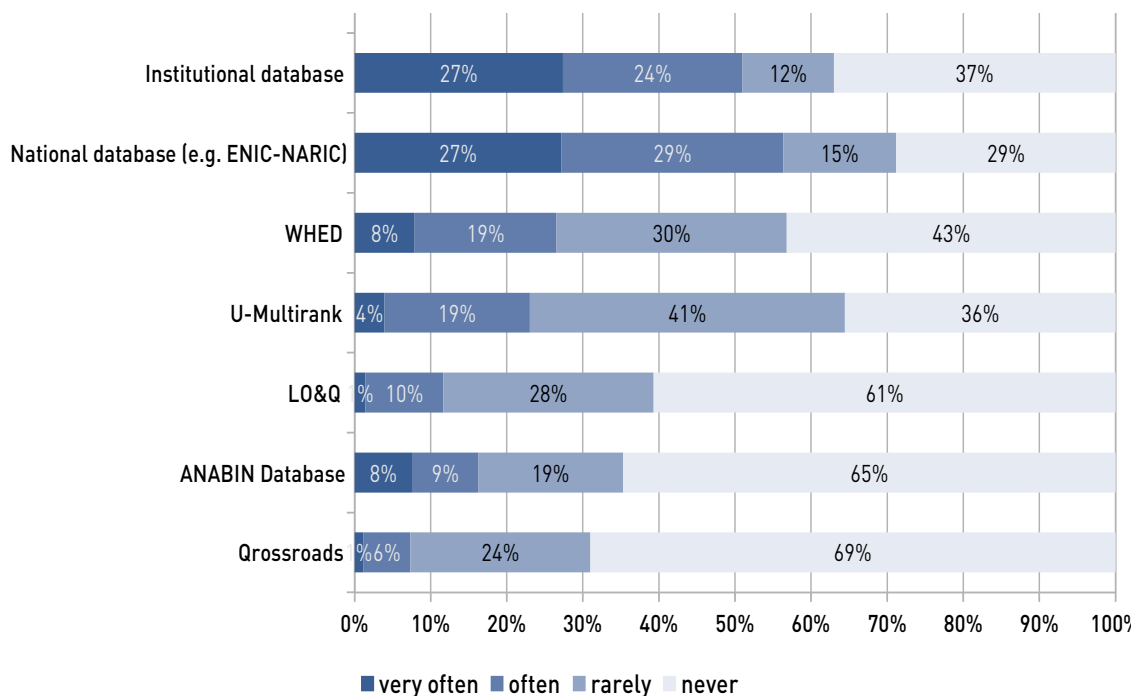
3.1 Overview

Figure 5: Use of existing higher education information tools (n=371)

In order to inform themselves about quality related information on higher education institutions and programmes, most users refer to national or institutional tools (see Figure 5). Respondents named over 70 databases, repositories or portals which they have OFTEN of VERY OFTEN consulted for such information. These results show, unsurprisingly, that users consult online tools within the (national) system they are most familiar with (see Annexes).

Although there is less familiarity with international databases, more than half of respondents have used the World Higher Education Database (WHED[3]) and U-Multirank[4], while 30% to 40% stated they accessed, even though less often, the databases of Anabin[5], Qrossroads[6] and Learning Opportunities and Qualifications in Europe[7]. Admittedly, the three latter tools

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[3] http://www.whed.net

[4] http://www.umultirank.org/

[5] http://anabin.kmk.org/no_cache/filter/hochschulabschluesse.html

[6] http://ecahe.eu/home/qrossroads/

[7] https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/en

are more specific in their scope (see description below), which might explain a lower familiarity within the surveyed group.
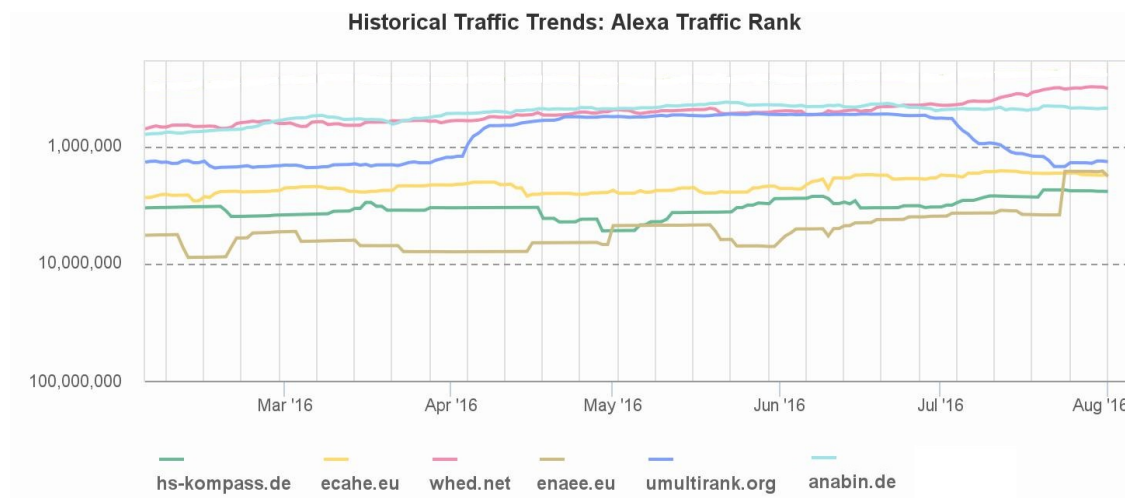

Figure 6: Web traffic rank of existing tools

The Alexa website traffic rank[8] confirms the survey results of the most frequently accessed international databases. The best ranked tools appear to be WHED, Anabin and U-Multirank (see Figure 6). These tools offer information about higher education institutions from all over the world, thus reaching out to a wider target group of people (see full description below).
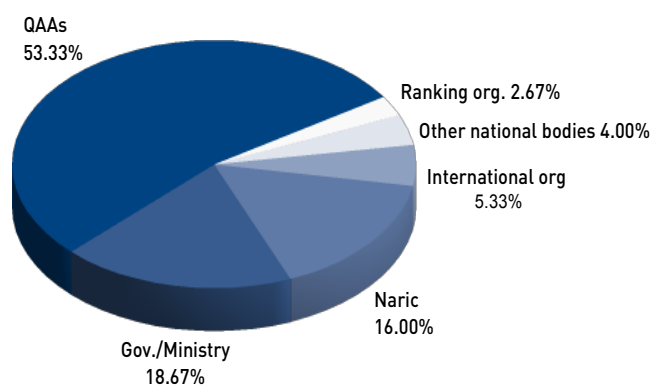

Figure 7: Existing tools by maintainer of data

Having a closer look at the online repositories, databases and portals which were listed by respondents, it appears that 53% of respondents refer to databases that were maintained or fed by quality assurance agencies (see Figure 7). About a third of respondents have consulted databases or portals maintained by national recognition centres (ENIC or NARIC) and national authorities. Less than 13% gained their information from internationally managed organisations, ranking tools or other specific national platforms.

3.2 Most relevant initiatives

Considering the information made available within these online platforms, it was analysed to which extent the existing information would include the information earmarked to be provided by the database considered by EQAR: (A) name of the HEI in local language or English, (B) information about the QAA, (C) the publication of review reports or decisions, (D) date and validity of the EQA, (E) type of EQA, (F) link to HEI's website, and (G) qualifications and cycle of study offered.

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[8] Alexa Traffic Rank compares how each site is ranked relative to other sites. The rank is calculated using a combination of average daily visitors to the site and page views on the site over the past 3,6 months. The site with the highest combination of visitors and pageviews is ranked #1.

Online portals that provided no information about individual higher education institutions (e.g. websites that provide system-level information) and private websites (i.e. only accessible to registered users) were not considered in this analysis.

A total of 68 online tools were analysed[9], revealing the following:

- While almost all online tools include information such as the name of the higher education institution, the cycles of study and information about the degrees or fields of study offered, about 63% (42 of 68) of these online tools actually contained some form of external quality assurance-related information (e.g. type or date of the external QA procedure).

- With very few exceptions, those databases or repositories that contain QA-related information cover a particular country or region and the information is usually supplied by one single QA agency.

- Reports or decisions resulting from the external QA of higher educations or programmes were published online in about half (36 of 68) of cases. Not surprisingly, given the publication requirement in ESG 2.4, this includes all websites of EQAR-registered agencies. Information on the type of the external QA procedure was offered within all these websites.

- Information such as date of the external quality assurance procedure and validity of the procedure is available on 13 of the examined websites. 27 other websites either give partial information, or they make available this information within the published reports/decision.

There are two types of existing initiatives that are particularly relevant for the purpose of this report, and which are therefore explored below in greater detail:

- **Databases/lists that include information from several QA agencies**: The existing examples are mostly managed by national (or bi-national, in one case) QA agencies or authorities (e.g. the German Accreditation Council, ANECA – subsection B below). While these online databases only cover one specific higher education system, at European level there are a few other initiatives that cover the activity of several quality assurance agencies within multiple higher education systems, i.e. Qrossroads and EUR-ACE (subsection A).

  The databases of CHEA and the USDE (subsection C) do not cover the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), but realise a comparable type of database for the USA, accumulating information from 61 (CHEA) / 53 (USDE) recognised accrediting agencies on programmes and institutions accredited by them.

  All these initiatives have in common that they integrate information from a number of different agencies (whether from one or more countries), and may thus face similar challenges as the database explored by the present report.

- **Online data sources that provide information on higher education institutions from multiple higher education systems** (subsection D below): This includes the European Tertiary Education Register (ETER[10]), WHED, ANABIN, U-Multirank and Learning Opportunities and Qualifications in Europe (formerly Ploteus).

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[9] See Annex. Overview of Databases:
https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1355MwlHFKqsPjdGAsmGgeJr7w2BCdRLkssU4eqOSBuQ/edit?usp=sharing

[10] https://www.eter-project.com/hei

These initiatives were examined due to their potential to serve as an underlying database, with basic information on institutions, which could be used for consistent identification and to complement data collected from quality assurance agencies.

Database	National system covered	A) HEI name	B) Info. about the QAA	C) Link to reports	D) EQA date & validity	E) Type of EQA	F) HEI's website	G) Quali-fications offered
ANECA	Spain	Local (ES)	Yes	Yes	EQA date	Yes	No	Yes
GAC	Germany	Local (DE)	Yes	Yes	EQA date & validity	Yes	Yes	Yes
Qrossroads	European (8 HE systems)	Local & EN	Yes	No	EQA date & validity	Yes	Yes	Yes
ETER	European (32 HE systems)	Local & EN	No	No	No	No	Yes	No (only study area)
EUR-ACE	Mostly European (36 HE systems)	Local & EN	Yes	No	EQA date & validity	Yes	Yes	Yes
WHED	International (180 HE systems)	Local & EN	sometime	No	No	No	Yes	No
ANABIN	International (180 HE systems)	Local & EN	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
U-Multirank	Mostly European	Local & EN	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
LO&Q	16 HE systems	Local or EN	No	No	No	No	Yes	Some
CHEA	USA (primarily)	Local (EN)	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Some
USDE	USA	Local (EN)	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Some

Table 1: Existing information tools that cover multiple higher education systems or information on external QA from several QA agencies

(A) European databases with information on external QA

Qrossroads

Qrossroads was developed by the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA). It currently provides information about 22641 programmes
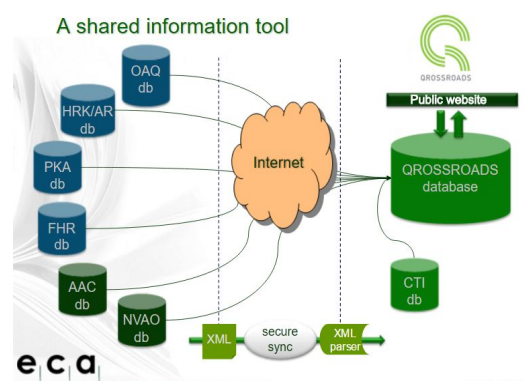

Figure 8: Qrossroads functioning

that have been quality assured or accredited by 16 EQAR-registered[11] quality assurance agencies.

Qrossroads is based on the idea of a 'shared information tool', where agencies have their own data sets, which are regularly updated (e.g. from their own websites), and which are automatically fed into a central database. Thus, once that link is established, there is very little ongoing effort required (see diagram of Qrossroads functioning).

Qrossroads' starting point is the study programme. A major difficulty is consequently that it does not offer a convincing way of presenting institutional accreditation/evaluation or audit, where information on the institution's programmes is not available.

Qrossroads was initially launched with a more complex set of information for each and every programme (e.g. learning outcomes, mode of study, duration etc.), but the information set was later reduced and now includes only basic information for each programme, including general information about the institution and programme (the name of the institution in local language or English, name of study programme(s) in English, qualification level, field of study), place of delivery (country, city, physical and website address) and details related to the quality assurance of the programme (name of the QA agency that has reviewed the programme and the validity date of the external QA procedure). Qrossroads, however, does not include external QA reports or links to the full reports.

Qrossroads was initially funded by the EU through various project. While Qrossroads continues to exist and agencies continue to provide information via it, there is no dedicated staff at central level who would be able to take care specifically of Qrossroads' functioning on a daily basis.

Since Qrossroads already has a functioning database for a third of EQAR-registered agencies (16 of 42), it could be efficient to cooperate closely with Qrossroads, to learn from their existing system as a starting point and to offer a compatibility option, so that agencies participating in Qrossroads could submit the same data to an EQAR database without additional effort.

Website: http://ecahe.eu/home/qrossroads/

EUR-ACE Label Database

EUR-ACE® is a label offered for engineering degree programmes at the first and second cycle level by quality assurance agencies that have been authorised by the European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education (ENAEE). The network covers 13 accreditation agencies from within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) that carry out accreditation/evaluation of engineering programmes. Half (6 of 13) of these agencies are also registered in EQAR.

As in Qrossroads, the EUR-ACE database is focused on accredited study programmes, while quality assurance at the institutional level is not presented.

The database has a user interface that allows to filter results (by agency, type and country) and download or print specific sets of data.

The information is entered manually by the QA agencies awarding the EUR-ACE label. It depends on the agency how regularly the information is updated, and the manual entry obviously places a significant burden and workload on agencies.

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[11] Qrossroads includes 17 agencies, the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Canonical Study Programmes (AKAST) is involved through GAC (see below), but is not EQAR-registered. It carries out very few accreditations.

As 4 of the 6 registered agencies awarding the EUR-ACE label also participate in Qross-roads, a separate compatibility option for the EUR-ACE label database would be of limited relevance.

Website: http://eurace.enaee.eu/

(B) National databases with information on external QA[12]

Central accreditation database of the German Accreditation Council (GAC)

The Accreditation Council was established to organise the system of quality assurance in learning and teaching through accreditation in Germany. Its database includes all study programmes that were awarded the quality seal of the Accreditation Council. This includes study programmes offered by higher education institutions which have been system accredited.

The database provides information on the institution awarding the degree, the accreditation procedure (e.g. experts involved) and period, as well as reports and decisions. The database is linked to the Higher Education Compass of the German Rectors' Conference as a way to connect the quality assurance information with further information on study opportunities in German higher education institutions.

The database is updated by the 10 quality assurance agencies that are authorised to award the quality seal of the Accreditation Council. Nine of these 10 quality assurance agencies are registered on EQAR[13].

By its nature the database does not cover external quality assurance activities outside of the mandatory system of accreditation in Germany. Therefore, the cross-border reviews carried out by the German accreditation agencies, which do not involve German higher education institutions, are not included in the central database.

General information on HEIs and their programmes is managed by HEIs themselves, through a web interface, and centrally coordinated by HRK. The QA agencies add to this information on accreditation manually, i.e. they enter every completed procedure manually through a web form. The information is then reviewed by GAC before publication.

The GAC database is regularly exported and automatically uploaded into the Qrossroads database (see above). A similar arrangement could be made for a possible database developed by EQAR. In addition, agencies would still need to add institutional external QA procedures and those outside the remit of the GAC; these are, however, limited in number.

Website: http://www.hs-kompass.de/kompass/xml/akkr/maske.html

Spanish national database "¿Qué estudiar y dónde?" (managed by ANECA)

The database is designed to provide users easy access to Spanish degrees and help guide students in their choice of official studies in Spain.

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[12] The two databases are the largest national repositories gathering data from several agencies and were thus chosen as examples for the analysis.

[13] AAQ, ACQUIN, AHPGS, AQ Austria, AQAS, ASIIN, evalag, FIBAA and ZEvA are registered. The Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Canonical Study Programmes (AKAST) is recognised by the GAC but it is not registered in EQAR. AKAST's external QA activities represent 0.3% of the total reviews in Germany and a very specific sector. It has been excluded from the present analysis. See also note re. Qrossroads above.

The database is developed and maintained by the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain (ANECA) and also includes external QA carried out by the Spanish regional QA agencies.

The database provides access to review reports of study programmes from Spanish universities according to the ex-ante verification procedure (VERIFICA) that have received a favourable decision following their approval from the Spanish Universities Council and authorization from the corresponding authority in the Autonomous Community. ANECA mostly collects information about the review procedures from other Spanish QA agencies. Whereas full reports are available for those procedures carried out by ANECA itself, this is not always the case for procedures by the regional agencies.

The database includes reports of the follow-up procedures (MONITOR and ACCREDITA), carried out by ANECA alone or in cooperation with other regional QA agencies. To confirm that a degree has passed all the academic and administrative procedures (after VERIFICA but prior to MONITOR and ACCREDITA), users are expected to cross-check the Register of Universities, Higher Education Colleges and Degrees (RUCT) of the Ministry of Education.

The database is modelled to provide information about degrees, and it does not offer reports or information about institutional quality (i.e. AUDIT procedure), although ANECA is currently considering adding such reports as well.

The website database attracts ca. 19 000 visitors annually. Since it has been established in 2010, ANECA has not received any complaints concerning the published information.

Website: http://srv.aneca.es/ListadoTitulos/en

(C) External QA databases in other regions

Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA, USA)

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation's (CHEA) database of accredited institutions and programmes lists more than 8 200 institutions and 23 900 programs that are accredited by accrediting organisations that have been recognised by CHEA or the United States Department of Education (USDE).

The database was developed in 2003 with the initial aim to list all higher education institutions that were reviewed by recognised accrediting organisations in the USA. In 2005, the database was expanded to include programmes as well. The permanent maintenance and update of the database requires staff time equivalent to 50% full-time equivalent (FTE).

The data is provided voluntarily by accreditors and most do participate. Only a very small number of accreditors (less than 5 of 61) have decided not to be part of the database. While CHEA has not surveyed the accreditors to explore the reasons for participation, the database increases visibility of the accredited programmes and institutions, and has become a significant source of information to the public about reliable institutions and programs.

The information is collected quarterly from accreditors. Accreditors either use a template or provide information in their own format. In either case, CHEA staff manually assemble or insert that information into the database.

CHEA does not alter the information in any way. Institutions and programmes that have multiple accreditations may thus show up twice in the database, potentially with different details. In case an issue is signalled with the existing information, CHEA would contact the accreditor and make sure that what is included in the database matches the accreditor's records. CHEA includes a disclaimer to that effect on its website.

CHEA's website attracts 750 000 to 800 000 visitors a year, ca. 85% of them use the CHEA database. This figure has remained stable for the past years.

Website: http://chea.org/search/default.asp

US Department of Education (USDE)

The US Department of Education (USDE) manages the "Database of Accredited Postsecondary Institutions and Programs", including all higher education institutions and programmes accredited by an accrediting or state approval agency recognised by the USDE (and including accrediting agencies that were accredited in the past). The database includes ca 7 000 institutions and over 30 000 programmes.

The database also offers information on accredited institutions that have closed or have lost or resigned their accreditation, as well as prior names and addresses of currently accredited institutions. The USDE is working to also make the full historical record of accreditation information available to the user in the near future.

The database is updated on an ongoing basis, i.e. the information is submitted to the USDE by recognised accreditors when they take action to accredit an institution or programme. Submitting information on accreditation to the USDE is obligatory for recognised agencies.

Recognised agencies only provide information on accreditation of an institution, while general information (name, address, etc.) is managed by the USDE itself.

USDE is currently preparing to launch a system where accreditors will enter the information themselves through a web interface. As it stands, the system will require accreditors to enter information one-by-one, but not allow for an upload of Excel or XML files. USDE has plans to improve data collection methods – incorporating feedback from accrediting agencies – after initial launch

The USDE database attracts ca. 1 500 000 visitors per year.

Website: http://ope.ed.gov/accreditation/Search.aspx

(D) European or international databases of HEIs or programmes

European Tertiary Education Register (ETER)

The European Tertiary Education Register (ETER) includes 2 785 higher education institutions (HEIs) from 36 countries, including the European Union member states, EEA-EFTA countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland) and candidate countries (Montenegro, Serbia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey), representing about 75% of the EHEA countries.

ETER includes all educational institutions for which a major activity is awarding qualifications at least at ISCED-2011 level 5; institutions delivering tertiary education as a side activity (for example professional associations) and HEIs with less than 200 students and 30 full-time equivalents of staff are excluded. The largest number of HEIs are from Germany (386), Poland (272), France (286), Turkey (182), Italy (176) and UK (151).

ETER's aim is to provide comparable micro-data for all HEIs (e.g. staff, student and graduate numbers). ETER is updated on a yearly basis with information provided by national statistics authorities. The most recently collected data relates to the academic year 2013/14.

While it is not within the scope of ETER to provide up-to-date information on quality assurance, it might be used as an existing list with unique identifiers of higher education institutions in Europe. ETER works in two steps: first, the list of higher education institutions (i.e.

the names and identification data, such as national codes) to be included in ETER is up-dated (called the "perimeter"). Then, in a second step, data is collected for those HEIs in the perimeter.

For EQAR, only the perimeter is directly relevant. While data is available and published with some delay, the perimeter would be available earlier. It could be possible to agree with ETER that EQAR might use the perimeter as soon as it is ready.

The ETER database could be used to provide the names, locations and websites of the higher education institutions. English names are available for all HEIs with a few excep-tions. In addition, ETER would allow a mapping between national ID numbers and ETER IDs for some countries.

For 2015, 94% of higher education institutions reviewed by EQAR-registered agencies were based in countries covered by ETER.

Website: https://www.eter-project.com/hei

World Higher Education Database (WHED)

The World Higher Education Database (WHED) Portal was developed by the International Association of Universities' (IAU) to provide information about higher education institutions in over 184 countries around the world. The database includes a specific set of information for each higher education institution, including the official name (often available also in English), the study level, admission requirements, fields of study etc.

The list of higher education institutions and systems is updated every year for a different re-gion. Other updates can also be included by the individual 634 member institutions of IAU.

While WHED also offers information about the 'accrediting agency', this information is not systematically included for all higher education institutions and is usually limited to the name of the agency that has carried out the review, with no further details about the ex-ternal quality assurance procedure (e.g. date of the review, validity, review report, link to the QA agency, etc.).

The database is used as an information source for different publications, e.g. the Interna-tional Handbook of Universities (2016).

Website: www.whed.net

Learning Opportunities and Qualifications in Europe

The European Union's database "Learning Opportunities and Qualifications in Europe" (formerly known as Ploteus) was developed in relation to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The database allows for a comparison of European countries based on their qualifications framework, provides information on student support schemes and a database/catalogue of learning opportunities across 17 higher education systems. The database includes all education sectors; higher education study programmes are available for 11 countries (AT, DK, GR, IE, LT, LV, PT, RS, SE, SI, NO).

The portal is under development and it is being connected to national databases on learning opportunities. So far, 14 countries have interconnected their qualifications frameworks databases into the Qualifications portal as the results of the national referencing process, higher education qualifications are included for 4 countries (GR, IE, LV, SI).

While the portal only includes learning opportunities and qualifications that are accredited, recognised or approved according to the respective national requirements, the portal does not include further, specific information on external quality assurance procedures.

Website: https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/en

U-Multirank

U-Multirank is a multi-dimensional ranking tool launched in 2014 with funds from the European Commission's Erasmus+ programme. It currently covers over 1300 higher education institutions from 90 countries. Around 57% of these institutions are based in European countries, 16% in North America, 18% in Asia and 9% in Oceania, Latin America and Africa. The participation of higher education institutions is voluntary.

The tool allows users to personalise their search for different higher education institutions while allowing for the possibility to rank and compare these institutions' strengths and weaknesses aspects that most interest them.

U-Multirank includes a comprehensive set of information drawing from data supplied by institutions, from international bibliometric and patent databases as well as surveys of students from participating universities.

U-Multirank is focused on comparing higher education institutions based on a quantitative data set and it does not include any information on quality assurance. Furthermore, due to its voluntary nature U-Multirank is not a comprehensive list of institutions, and does not have an explicitly defined coverage.

Website: http://www.umultirank.org/

Anabin Database

The Anabin database is developed by the Central Office for Foreign Education (ZAB), the German national recognition information centre. The database aims to comprehensively document foreign educational systems, including over 25 000 higher education institutions and 22 000 university degrees from over 180 countries world-wide. The information in Anabin is updated ad-hoc, on a per-need basis.

The database provides a platform to evaluate foreign education credentials and their correspondence to a bachelor, master or doctoral degree programme in a German higher education institution. Anabin is a database managed primarily for national purposes, even though it appears to be used by many ENIC-NARIC centres from other countries as well.

Anabin does not include information on external quality assurance of higher education institutions or programmes according to the ESG.

While the database includes in many instances the name of higher education institution in English, the search engine does not provide for the possibility to carry out a search/browsing of the database in English. All information (i.e. search instruction, programme description) is only available in German.

Website: http://anabin.kmk.org/no_cache/filter/hochschulabschluesse.html

3.3 Valued added in light of existing initiatives

Existing tools that provide external quality assurance-related information about higher education institutions are mostly national in scope, with the few exceptions discussed above.

Only very few international databases and repositories include information on the external QA of the institutions and programmes they contain. This information is often patchy and limited, and it appears that the existing initiatives do not fully meet users' needs when it comes to information on external QA results.

The databases operated by GAC, ANECA, Qrossroads and EUR-ACE are similar in approach to the possible EQAR database analysed in this report. However, only the databases of GAC and ANECA (partially) give access to the external QA report. Moreover, these databases cover only a certain group of quality assurance agencies (e.g. members of ECA), external quality assurance within one country (e.g. agencies certified to operate in Germany) or a particular type of external QA (e.g. only the VERIFICA procedure in Spain); none of them cover all external QA activities of their "feeding" agencies within the scope of the ESG.

There is currently no database of all external QA procedures carried out in line with the ESG. It is thus important to underline that the EQAR database would not compete with other existing databases, but would have the distinct purpose to enhance accessibility of external quality assurance decision and reports. It would include HEIs that were subject to an external QA procedure officially recognised to be in line with the ESG, by an EQAR-registered agency.

3.4 Possible synergies and collaboration

The database should minimise the effort required from registered quality assurance agencies. In general, as a regulator EQAR should be mindful not to place unnecessary burden on registered agencies. Furthermore, since participation would be voluntary, minimising the registered agencies' effort is key to success. To that end, it is crucial to collaborate with and build on existing initiatives where possible.

In order to allow for reliable and consistent identification of HEIs, the database should ideally use an existing list of HEIs in Europe as a reference, e.g. ETER, WHED, ANABIN or U-Multirank. This source could also be used to complement information on higher education institutions (e.g. name in English and local language, EQF, website link to HEIs), especially where registered agencies have difficulties providing that information.

Aspects to be considered in choosing an underlying reference database are coverage of higher education systems, comprehensiveness, reliability, license terms for the use of data and frequency of update of the data set. These issues are explored in the section 4.4 below.

Secondly, for some registered agencies the quality assurance-related information is available centrally already, i.e. through Qrossroads, GAC and ANECA databases. It would be relevant to explore the possibility to collect this information directly from Qrossroads, GAC and ANECA (provided the approval of the agencies concerned), while offering a way to easily introduce the missing external QA activities (from other agencies and cross-border external QA that are not covered by these databases) in addition.

4. Feasibility

In order to gauge the feasibility of a database, EQAR carried out a survey of registered QA agencies, which was answered by 36 of 43 registered agencies. The survey addressed:

- Information maintained by agencies on their external QA procedures (see 4.2 below)

- Existing tools into which agencies are feeding data (see 4.3 below)

- Identification of higher education institutions (see 4.4 below)

- Modes of data delivery to a central database (see 4.3 below)

Generally, the survey showed that most agencies collect and maintain the information that is relevant and of interest to users (see section 4.2 below). Some agencies noted that they do not currently publish all information they dispose of or collect from institutions, but they could make it nonetheless available.

4.1 Objective of the database

Given the information at the disposal of registered agencies and available through European database (see chapter 3 above and section 4.2 below), and considering the diversity of external QA approaches under the umbrella of the ESG, it would be feasible to establish a database that allows users to identify whether a specific higher education institution has been subject to external quality assurance in line with the ESG, by an EQAR-registered agency (at institutional level, or one or more of its programmes), and to easily access the corresponding report(s).

It would not be feasible to list all study programmes offered by higher education institutions with an institutional accreditation/evaluation/audit, since this information is not always at the disposal of the respective agencies (and not always centrally collected at national level by another authority).

In order to represent all higher education institutions in a comparable and fair way, irrespective of the (national) external quality assurance system they are subject to, the starting point should thus be the institution. That is, the database would allow to search for an institution, but not for individual programmes.

The database would recognise the diversity of external quality assurance within Europe and thus help users to contextualise the information for each country, system or institution by combining information on:

- higher education institutions and (if the case) programmes that have been subject to external quality assurance by an EQAR-registered agency, and

- the respective country's external quality assurance system (i.e. information already currently provided on the EQAR website).

The information on the external QA system would help the user in understanding the external QA results, while it would be up to the user to interpret and draw conclusions from the information provided.

In addition to the full external QA report, the database would provide basic information (metadata) on the type of external quality assurance, formal decision, etc. (see section 5.3

below), so as to help the user in interpreting the results. While the reports might be in different languages, the metadata would always be available in English.

For many institutions there would be several reports from several agencies, e.g. an obligatory institutional audit, a voluntary institutional evaluation and a number of programmes with specialised accreditation. The basic information on each external QA procedure would help users understand the status and meaning of different reports.

4.2 Information needed by users

The information to be presented in a possible database has to take into account what data the agencies could easily supply, and what importance potential users attach to different types of information.

Respondents to the survey of potential users were therefore asked (see question 8) which categories of information are important for their needs.

Likewise, registered quality assurance agencies were asked (see question 2) which data their information on external QA procedures currently includes, and about the feasibility of providing the information that is currently not available.

Most potential users find it IMPORTANT or VERY IMPORTANT having access to most categories of information (see charts below). Highest importance (over 50% of respondents) was nonetheless given to:

1. Information about the higher education institution (HEI) regarding:
   - the name of the institution,
   - country of the institution,
   - website of the HEI;

2. Information about the external QA procedure:
   - name of the external QA process,
   - if it resulted in a formal decision,
   - the validity period,
   - web link(s) to external QA report(s);

3. Additional information for external QA at programme level:
   - name of the study programme in English,
   - name of the awarded qualification(s),
   - qualifications framework level (NQF and QF-EHEA).

Based on the survey of registered agencies, providing the basic set of information as suggested in the surveys does not seem to present major difficulties, safe very few exceptions (see Figures 9, 10, 11). Some information is not available at the moment, but most agencies responded that it could be easily included. Only a few areas were found to be more difficult:

- Providing the name of the higher education institution, or the name of the programme, in English was considered difficult by some agencies. Agencies explained that the official English names of higher education institutions are sometimes not available to them, or that they do not not collect information about the names of study programmes they have reviewed in other languages.

- Two agencies commented that information on the QF-EHEA levels might be difficult to include. This was mainly due to the fact that the respective higher education system has not yet referenced its national qualifications framework to the QF-EHEA (e.g Spain, Kosovo).

- Information about the ISCED levels of study programmes is not collected systematically by quality assurance agencies and is not considered very important by most users. The ISCED level has therefore been omitted in the operational model.

In general, the survey results show that registered agencies systematically collect and maintain information about their external QA procedures of institutions or programmes, including links to the full external QA report.

While most agencies also maintain general information (or said they could easily supply this information) such as country and website of the higher education institutions, a smaller number of quality assurance agencies mentioned that information that does not directly related to the external QA procedure would be difficult to supply.

In order to fill these gaps, it would be useful to build on an existing list or database of higher education institutions that includes such information, as a starting point, and then to add information supplied by agencies on their external QA procedures.
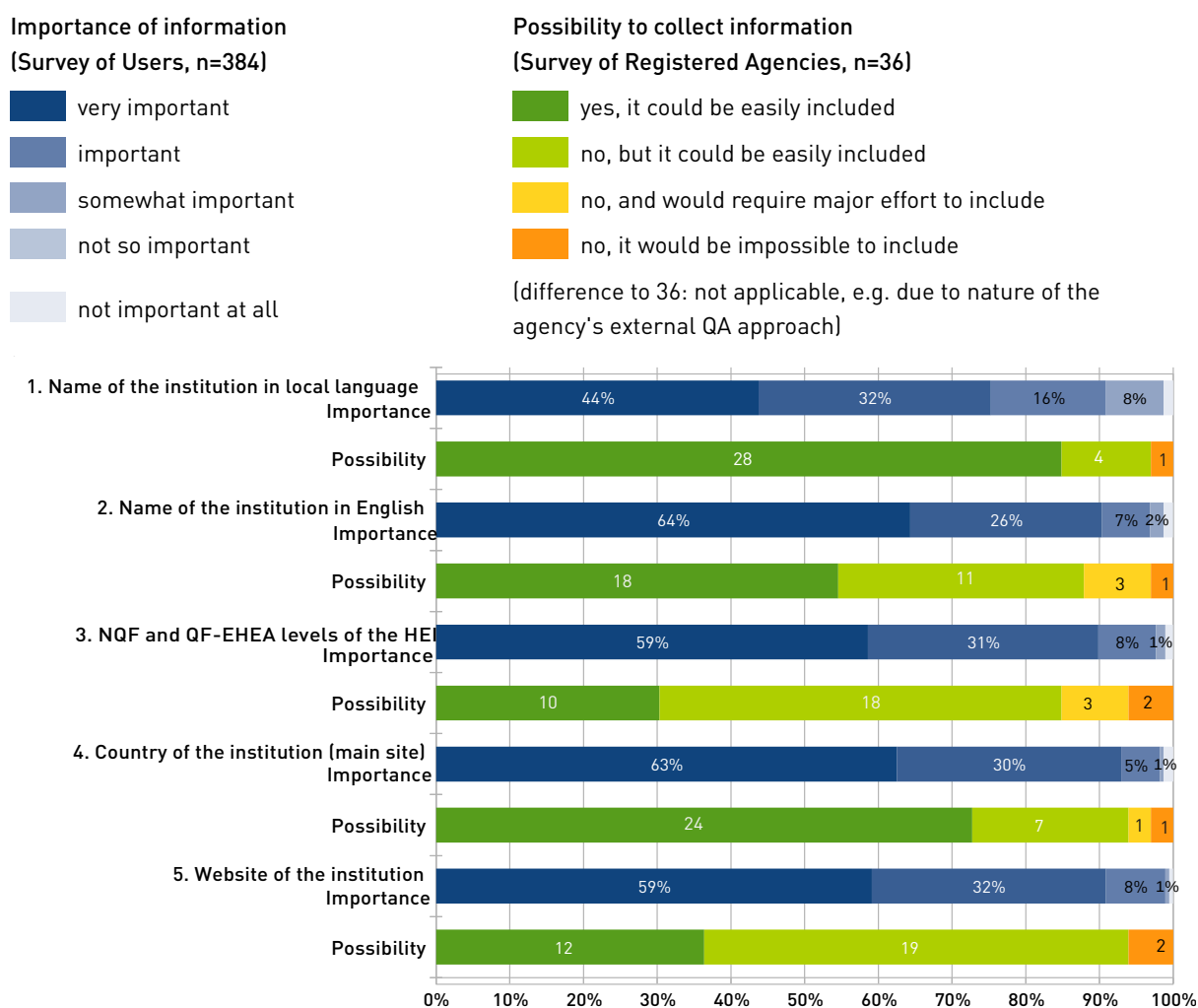
**Importance of information
(Survey of Users, n=384)**

- ◼ very important
- ◼ important
- ◼ somewhat important
- ◼ not so important
- ◻ not important at all

**Possibility to collect information
(Survey of Registered Agencies, n=36)**

- ◼ yes, it could be easily included
- ◼ no, but it could be easily included
- ◼ no, and would require major effort to include
- ◼ no, it would be impossible to include

(difference to 36: not applicable, e.g. due to nature of the agency's external QA approach)

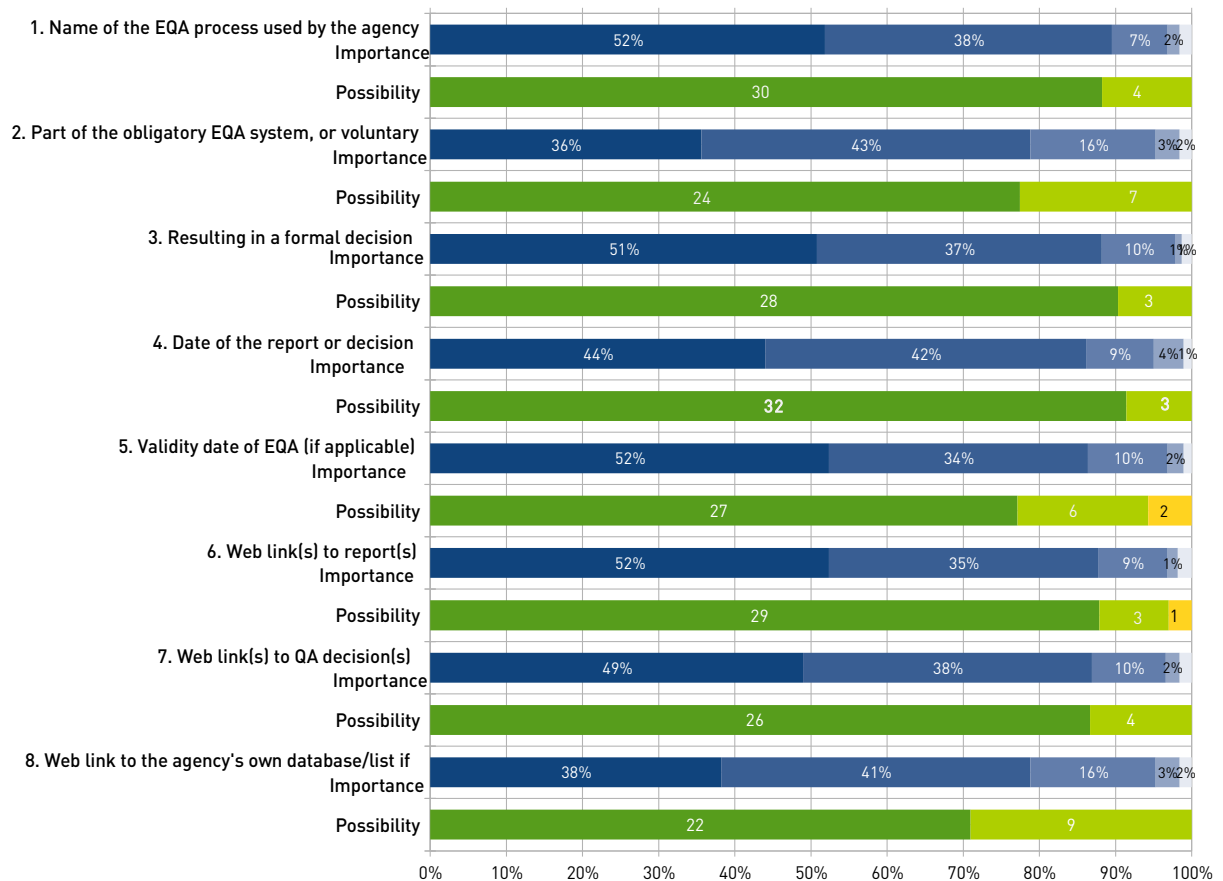Figure 9: Information about the higher education institution (HEI)

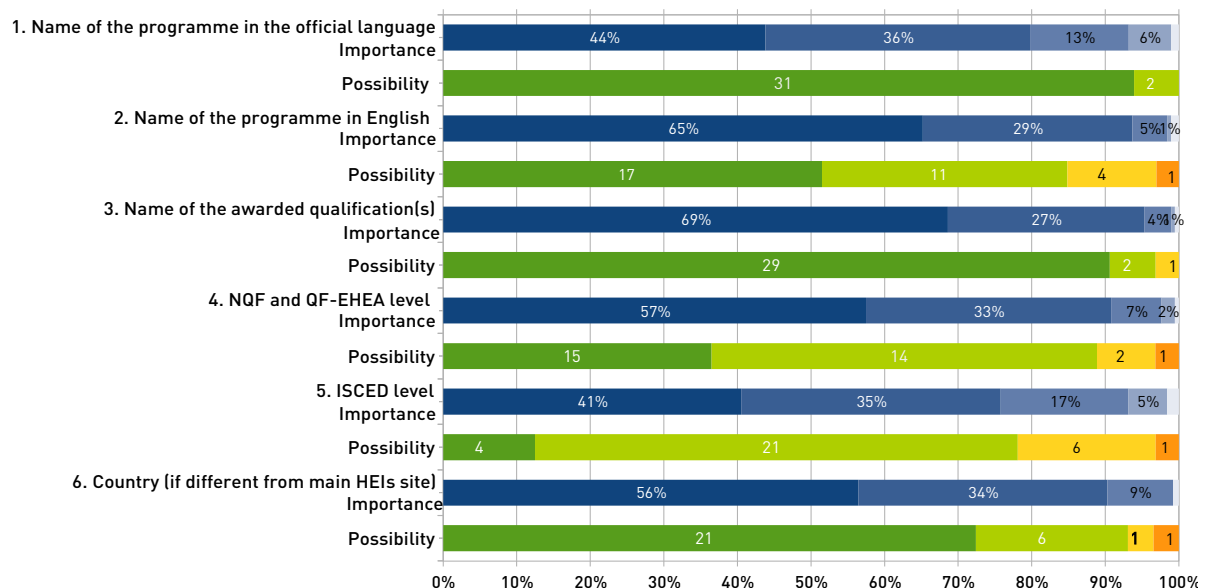**Figure 10: Information about the external quality assurance (EQA) procedure**

Figure 11: Additional information for external QA at programme level

4.3 Data delivery

Most registered quality assurance agencies maintain their information on quality assurance of institutions and programmes in some structured database management system. On their

public websites, 19 of 43 registered agencies supply information on external QA via a database or search engine of reviewed higher education institutions or programmes. Agencies that carry out on average a smaller number of reviews tend to publish the information in a simple format on their websites (e.g. textual data or list with no search function). Nevertheless, some of those agencies will have the same information organised in a database, or at least in a spreadsheet, internally.

Those agencies that manage their own database, or maintain information on their external QA procedures in a structured format, would most likely be able to automatically feed that information into a central database. The main effort needed would be to create the necessary interface once.

Taking into account whether agencies have any experience in feeding data into other databases, 44% of surveyed agencies stated that they do so, mostly supplying data into national databases (e.g. in Germany, Lithuania, Russia, Spain) or into the European database Qrossroads. The data is entered/uploaded manually in most cases (12 out of 16).

With regards to feeding data into a central database, agencies indicated that they would prefer to upload data in a structured format (CSV or XML), either automatically or through a web interface (see Figure 12). A few agencies indicated preference for a manual entry of data through a web interface. One agency explained that they choose this option since their internal database is not public nor linked to any third party databases.
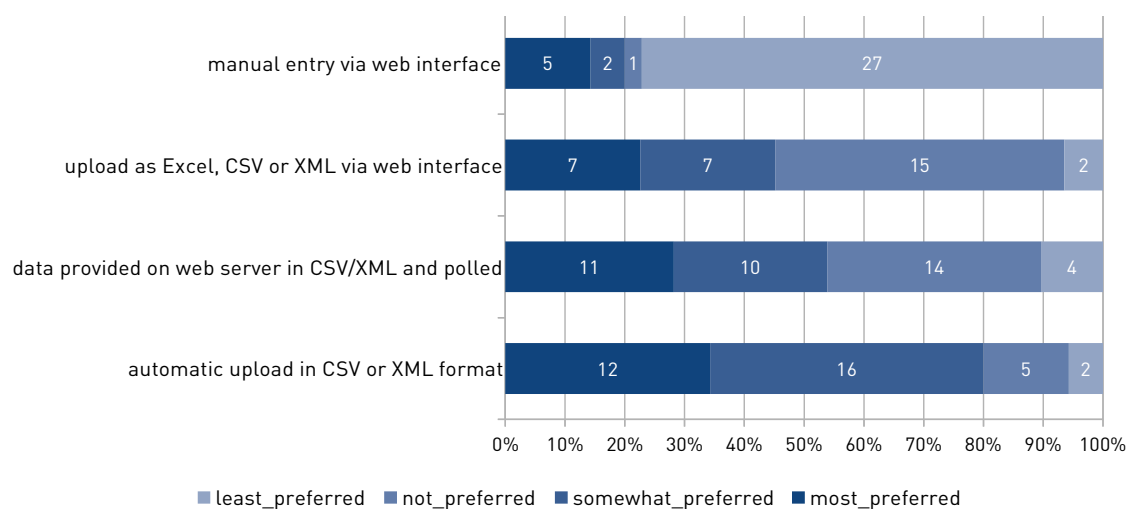

Figure 12: Preferred modality to supply data on external QA activities

One agency specifically suggested that they would prefer an automatic option where information that the agency already supplies (manually) to Qrossroads would be linked and automatically provided to EQAR for the proposed database.

These results show that collecting the data of agencies' external quality assurance activities into a central database would have to be done so as to require minimal effort from the side of agencies. In order to provide a flexible interface for all agencies, considering their different profiles and sizes, both options should be offered, i.e. upload in a structured format as well as manual entry.

4.4 Identification of HEIs

It is common that for one HEI there will be several external QA procedures by different registered agencies. It is key to relate these together reliably and consistently, in order for the

database to be user-friendly. The database would thus need to be based on a "master file" of HEIs, i.e. an existing list of HEIs to which agencies relate their information on external QA procedures.

Agencies currently do not use European systems of unique identifiers of HEIs (see Figure 13). Some of them use a national identification system set up by the ministry (e.g. Belgium – Flemish Community, France, Netherlands, Spain) or an internal code set up by the agencies themselves (KAA, ASHE, fmid).
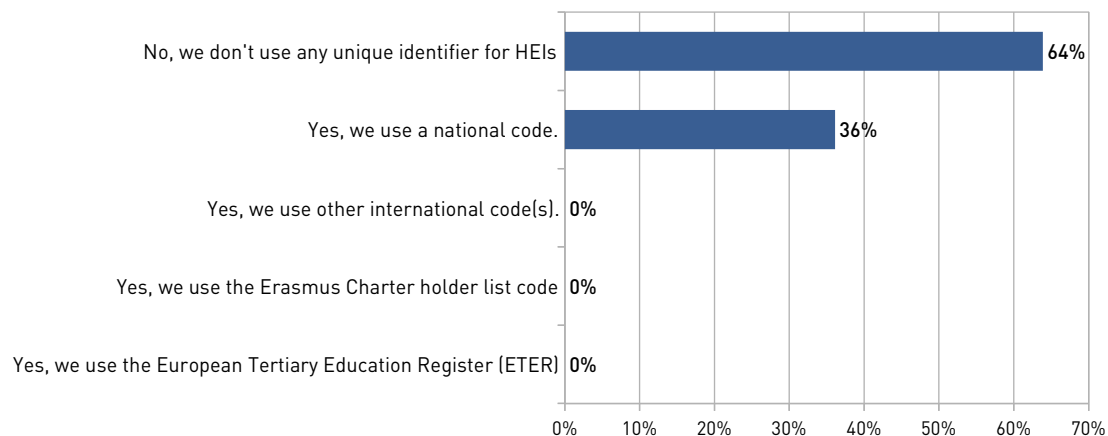

Figure 13: Use of unique identifiers for higher education institutions (n=36)

EQAR could establish its own master file and system of IDs, or build on an existing source. The latter option would use synergies efficiently (see section 3.4 above), and further bear the advantages of being able to fetch complimentary information from an existing source.

The following table summarises the reliability of data sources, licence for the use of data, the coverage of higher education systems and institutions, and the frequency of updates of the data set. Further details on these sources can be found in section 3.2.

Source	Data from	License terms	Coverage	Update frequency
ETER	National Statistical Authorities	No payment or written licence required	75% of EHEA countries / ca. 95% of reviews of EQAR-registered agencies in 2015	Yearly
WHED	Higher education institutions	Subject to discussion	EHEA and beyond	Europe - once every 5 years
U-Multirank	Higher education institutions, surveys, bibliometric db.	No payment or written licence required	Focus on Europe although also covers HEIs in US, China, Australia	Yearly

Table 2: Overview of online tools on a number of dimensions

In terms of collecting and updating data on higher education institutions, ETER relies on official national statistical authorities. WHED, U-Multirank mostly collect their data directly from higher education institutions. While information collected from higher education institutions would also be accurate, having a single official source would be an easier option and would eventually lend more credibility to the database.

The access to the full list of higher education institutions and corresponding information is currently freely available within the ETER and U-Multirank tools, which have received finan-

cing from the EU and thus are developed under a free public access licence. The use of WHED would be subject to agreement with the managing organisation.

In terms of coverage, WHED has a global reach, while ETER and U-Multirank (for the most part) are focused on higher education institutions in Europe. The table below compares the coverage of WHED, ETER and U-Multirank for a sample of EHEA countries. The data shows that the coverage of higher education institutions is sometimes more comprehensive within the WHED database or ETER and less so for U-Multirank.

WHED sometimes lists affiliated colleges or semi-independent institutes or faculties as separate institutions, which explains the difference in numbers between WHED and ETER. Moreover, ETER's thresholds in terms of student/staff numbers (see section 3.2) explains the larger number of HEIs in WHED in some countries.

	France	Germany	Russia	Spain	United Kingdom	Croatia
ETER	316 HEIs	390 HEIs	n/a	80 HEIs	150 HEIs	38 HEIs
WHED	371 HEIs	353 HEIs	834 HEIs	109 HEIs	254 HEIs	35 HEIs
U-Multirank	67 HEIs	67 HEIs	31 HEIs	63 HEIs	48 HEIs	2 HEIs

Table 3: Coverage of HE systems (sample) in different databases

The update of the databases is done on a yearly basis for ETER and U-Multirank, while WHED updates are collected every year for one region, which would mean that most of the European higher education institutions would be updated once every five year (except IAU members, that have the possibility to update their data entry anytime).

Given the limited coverage of U-Multirank, it is not suitable for use as a reference list of HEIs. While WHED covers some additional countries, given its official status, open license terms and shorter updating cycle (annually as opposed to every five years) ETER would be the preferred initiative to use as a starting point for a reference list ("master file") of HEIs.

4.5 Risk Analysis

EQAR is an officially recognised institution within the EHEA. It has become a standard reference in quality assurance of higher education for policy makers and stakeholders at European and national level. Any database or information it offers therefore needs to be accurate, so as to protect its reputation.

During meetings and discussions with EQAR members and committees a number of risks have been raised related to the development of a database.

This section considers those and possible other reputational, legal and financial risks that may result from setting up the database, and presents approaches to mitigate them.

Inaccurate or outdated information

Information on higher education institutions and external QA procedures could become incomplete or inaccurate if not updated, and this could harm EQAR's reputation.

Analysis and mitigation

Since agencies cannot be obliged to provide information, the database should indicate which registered agencies are not included (if any). At the same time, agencies that provide information would be expected to provide complete and comprehensive information on their external QA activities within the scope of the ESG.

The list of and information on HEIs should be managed by EQAR itself, so as to enhance accuracy. It should be updated regularly from a reliable source (e.g. ETER or WHED), and there should be a robust and effective procedure for addressing missing or flawed data, if notified by HEIs or agencies.

Information on higher education institution will change when institutions merge, change name or close. While not an uncommon scenario, it should not be expected to be the case for more than 5-10% of HEIs in a year.

Information on external QA procedures does normally not change once it has been published, except for accreditation, audit certificates or similar being withdrawn, or either the HEI or a programme shutting down.

The database system should be able to handle expiry of accreditation or similar itself. For other cases, agencies would need to ensure that information on external QA procedures is updated, if necessary. It should also be underlined that agencies are responsible for the information on external QA procedures, which is entirely in their control.

Lack of usefulness or relevance

Losing relevance for its users is an inherent risk of any such project, if it fails to correspond to its users' needs.

Analysis and mitigation

The feedback from the survey of potential users suggests a clear relevance of the database for potential users. The ongoing policy debates in the Bologna Process further suggest that external quality assurance in line with the ESG, and accessibility of its results and reports, will continue to play a crucial role, especially in connection with the automatic recognition of qualifications.

Nevertheless, there are some conditions that should be met to maximise the database's usefulness:

- Data from (almost) all registered agencies would need to be included in the database for it to make most sense.

- The database functionalities (search, listing, selection, dowload) should be easy to use and user-friendly in order to engage and not discourage any possible user. It will need to be ensured that the database remains easily usable and accessible, both for agencies delivering data as well as for end users. The financial planning should thus include sufficient provision for continuous technical maintenance and updates.

- Visitor statistics should be analysed regularly, and users' needs and feedback should be surveyed regularly to maximise the usability of the database and thus ensure its relevance long term.

Misinterpretation

Given the different external quality assurance systems across the EHEA and the different types of external QA covered by the ESG (e.g. external QA as part of the obligatory national system as well as voluntary evaluations), users might misinterpret information.

Analysis and mitigation

The risk needs to be addressed by clear and proper explanation and contextualisation of the information provided. This would include (a) a clear general explanation and statement of

scope, and (b) clarity of the information provided for every external QA procedure in the database.

The general explanation (a) should clarify that the database covers all external QA in the scope of the ESG, carried out by EQAR-registered agencies, and that – under the umbrella of the ESG – there exist a variety of external QA systems in Europe. In particular, it needs to be clearly explained that some countries officially require external quality assurance at institutional level, some at programme level, some at both and some not at all; whereas both institutional and programme-level approaches are equally valid and accepted by the ESG.

As regards specific external QA procedures and results (b), the following needs to be clearly stated:

- Whether it relates to a specific programme or the institution as a whole

- Whether it is part of the obligatory national QA system, or a voluntary procedure

- Whether it resulted in a formal decision and, if so, what was the decision

To allow users to contextualise this, information on the national external QA system (e.g. what kind of external QA requirements apply in the country of the HEI) would be shown in conjunction with the information (see section 5.3).

Financial sustainability

One important lesson to be learned from existing initiatives and various European projects is that the database would need sustainable funding in the long term, in order to remain up-to-date and relevant for its users.

Analysis and mitigation

EQAR would potentially be able to ensure sustainable funding, through its regular budget based on annual membership fees by European governments and stakeholder organisations. This would ensure independence of project or other short-term funds

The database should be designed in such a way that the need for central administration and intervention is minimised, so as to limit the long-term operational costs.

Legal action

EQAR could be taken to court in relation to damages resulting from information presented in the database.

Analysis and mitigation

The legal implications of the database are crucial. The risk of being subject to legal action, however, seems limited.

In order to hold EQAR liable for damages, a claimant would need to demonstrate that information provided by EQAR is inaccurate or misleading, that they experienced damages as a result, and that there is a causal link, i.e. that information provided by EQAR have led to the damages.

As a rule, EQAR will, however, not publish anything that would not also be published elsewhere (at least technically, even if it is not easily accessible elsewhere). Rather, EQAR would primarily act as an information aggregator: basic information on HEIs would largely rely on an official and reliable existing sources (e.g. ETER or national authorities), whereas information on external QA procedures would be provided by the registered agencies, who would

retain full responsibility for it. A clause to that effect should be included in the terms and conditions that registered agencies would be asked to accept when supplying data.

The database should further include a clear statement of scope (what users may find in the database, the sources of information, the responsibility for information presented, the date of the last update etc.) and disclaimer. This is widespread practice and can be found on any similar website or database.

4.6 Key design requirements

The following key design requirements or principles have been distilled from the preceding analysis, and have been used as a starting point for the proposal:

1. **Free**: the information provided by the database should be free and easily accessible through the EQAR website, with links to review reports of higher education institution or programmes.

2. **Accessible and understandable**: to make sense of the diverse external QA systems in the EHEA, the database needs to provide contextual information to understand the status and meaning of a specific review in the institution's national context.

3. **Accurate**: the information provided through a database run by EQAR must be accurate and up-to-date.

4. **Comprehensive**: all reviews of registered agencies must be presented, not only a subset (i.e. not only reviews in home country, or only some type of reviews).

5. **Equal representation of approaches**: institutions should be equally represented in the database, no matter if they are accredited/audited at institutional level or have their different programmes accredited; all types of reports must be covered (also if there is no decision, for instance).

6. **Open to contributors**: all EQAR-registered agencies must be able to feed information in the database, if they wish; there should be different technical solutions so that agencies can choose which ones is easiest for them.

7. **Open to users**: next to the frontend on EQAR's own website, the database should also be available as "open data", using standard technologies, so that others can use or embed it

5. Operational model

Based on the analysis above and the key design requirements, the following sections present a possible operational model for the database.

5.1 Scope

The database would aim to include **all external quality assurance reports and decisions by EQAR-registered agencies on higher education institutions and programmes**, including all types of external quality assurance within the scope of the ESG (e.g. evaluation, accreditation, audit, review).

For external quality assurance processes resulting in a formal decision (e.g. accreditation) this includes **both cases with a positive and negative result**.

Since both are covered by the ESG and thus by EQAR, the database would further include both **external quality assurance procedures that are part of the obligatory national external quality assurance system** (e.g. accreditation linked to official recognition) **and other, voluntary external quality assurance procedures** (e.g. additional evaluation at the institution's own initiative).

5.2 Functionality
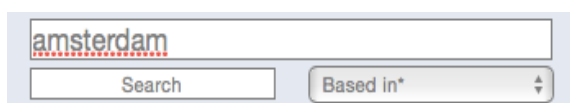
Users would be able to search for an institution by a keyword (matched against the name and location), or to browse the list of institutions by country.

After selecting an institution, the user would be presented with a list of external quality assurance procedures, which might be at institutional or programme level (incl. joint programmes). For each external quality assurance procedure, basic information and a link to the report (at the agency's website) would be provided.

Similarly, the user could consult a list of external QA procedures performed by a specific EQAR-registered agency, accessible from the agency's register entry.

The following illustrations show how the user interface might look in practice.

1. **Search for a HEI:**

2. **Select HEI from matches:**

Name	Based in*
University of Amsterdam	Netherlands
VU University Amsterdam	Netherlands
Amsterdamse Hogeschool voor de Kunsten	Netherlands
Hogeschool van Amsterdam	Netherlands
...	...

3. List of external QA results (reports and decisions) at the HEI:

VU University of Amsterdam (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

Showing current details - click to include history

1. Basic information

Country:	Netherlands
Website:	http://vu.nl/nl/index.aspx
NQF and QF-EHEA cycles:	First, Second and Third Cycle

2. National External Quality Assurance System

Obligatory external quality assurance required in the Netherlands:

- Programme accreditation (required if no institutional audit)
- Institutional audits (optional)

3. External Quality Assurance Reports and Decisions

3.a Institutional level

Institutional Audit by NVAO −

Status:	Part of the obligatory EQA system
Formal decision:	yes, positive with conditions or restrictions
Date:	2014-09-03
Valid until:	2016-09-02
Report and decision:	Audit report (language: English)
	Audit decision (language: Dutch)

Institutional Evaluation by IEP −

Status:	Voluntary
Formal decision:	no
Date:	2014-01-23
Valid until:	n/a
Report and decision:	Evaluation report (language: English)

3.b Programme level

Architecture (Accreditation by NVAO) +

Biology (Accreditation by NVAO) +

Liberal Arts and Sciences (Accreditation by NVAO) −

Status:	Part of the obligatory EQA system
Formal decision:	yes, positive
Date:	2014-01-27
Valid until:	2020-01-26
Qualification:	Bachelor of Arts (Amsterdam University College) (joint degree)
NQF and QF-EHEA level:	First cycle
Report and decision:	Accreditation report (language: English)
	Accreditation decision (language: Dutch)

Mechatronics (Accreditation by ASIIN) +

Public Administration (Accreditation by EAPAA) −

Status:	Voluntary
Formal decision:	yes, positive with conditions or restrictions
Date:	2011-09-06
Valid until:	2018-09-06
Qualification:	Master of Public Administration
NQF and QF-EHEA level:	Second cycle
Report and decision:	Accreditation report (language: English)
	Accreditation decision

Figure 14: Mock up of the database's user interface

In addition, users would be able to use/access the information as follows:

1. Search, browse or filter external quality assurance reports by

   a. Quality assurance agency

   b. Report date

   c. Type of review

2. Download information (complete or filtered, as CSV or Excel file)

3. Embed database in their own websites or applications (retrieve full data or search results in XML format)

5.3 Information to include

As discussed in section 4.2 above, it would generally be feasible and relevant to include the following information in the database. Some elements would not be applicable in certain case, or some agencies might not be able to provide them; these would thus be optional (see footnotes). Registered agencies would be expected to provide this information in a structured format (see section 5.5 below).

1. **Identification of the higher education institution (HEI)**

   a. ID number[14]

   b. Name in official language(s)[14]

   c. Name in English[14]

   d. Country

   e. Website[15]

   f. NQF and QF-EHEA levels at which the HEI offers qualifications[15]

2. **Information on external quality assurance procedure(s)**

   a. Quality assurance agency

   b. Name of the external quality assurance procedure

   c. Level[16]:
   INSTITUTIONAL | PROGRAMME

> **Use case:** The register entry of each agency would include a link to the respective agency's external QA procedures.

> **Use case**: Downloading the information can be useful for researchers or for statistical analysis. This should be freely accessible, since the information is public and EQAR operates in the public interest.

> **Use case**: Recognition authorities/offices might embed a search for external QA procedures and reports in their own applications, making their workflow more efficient compared to officers needing to visit the EQAR website.
>
> Similarly, small agencies (who do not have an own database) might use the web-interface to supply data and re-embed it into their own website.

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[14] For those institutions contained in the ETER the ETER ID would be used, own ID numbers would be assigned for others. Agencies should identify the institution by its ID number (preferred) or, should that not be possible, by its name. As a rule, the name should be provided in as many languages as available to the agency. The data would be completed with the institution's name (in English, the official language or both) from ETER data, where possible.

[15] Optional information; where possible, this could be completed from other sources, e.g. ETER. QF-EHEA levels to be included if the respective NQF has been self-certified.

[16] Short explanatory texts would be provided (e.g. in a pop-up window) to explain the meaning of those categories and thus allow users to understand the information correctly in context.

   d. Decision[16]:
     POSITIVE | POSITIVE WITH CONDITIONS | NEGATIVE | N/A (= not resulting in a formal decision)

   e. Status[16]:
     PART OF THE OBLIGATORY EXTERNAL QA SYSTEM | VOLUNTARY

   f. Date of decision entering into force or report becoming valid
     (as defined by the agency)

   g. Valid until
     (expiry of accreditation, certification, etc., as defined by the agency and if applicable)

   h. Report(s) and decision(s)

   i. For programme-level QA procedures:
     i. Name of the programme in official language(s) and English[17]
     ii. Name of the qualification(s) awarded
     iii. Country (if different from HEI's main site)
     iv. NQF and QF-EHEA level[15]

5.4 Historic record

The database would cover those **external quality assurance procedures that were completed at a time when the agency was registered on EQAR.**

Initially, agencies would be requested to upload **information on external QA procedures that were completed during their registration period and that are still valid**. Optionally, agencies could upload information on external QA procedures that were completed during their registration period, but that have already expired.

As a result, the database would be **comprehensive for external QA procedures valid in 2017 and later**, whereas the archive will be partial for external QA procedures that expired before 2017.

> **Use case**: Recognition officers will often want to find out about the quality assurance status of an HEI at the time when a qualification was issued, rather than now.

Normally, users would only see information on external QA procedures that are currently valid. External QA procedures without a defined validity (e.g. evaluation without formal decision) would be considered valid for 6 years as a default[18].

The database would, however, keep and accumulate a full historic record. Optionally, users would be able to also see expired external QA procedures, to see only external QA procedures that were valid at a certain point in time, or to consult a full history of changes (e.g. changes in an HEI's name, changes to the information on an external QA procedure).

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[17] As a rule, the name should be provided in as many languages as available to the agency.

[18] While the ESG do not specify a default period, in the context of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes a period of 6 years was recognised as widely applied in the EHEA.

5.5 Technical aspects

Data model

Given the need to consistently identify HEIs and reliably relate to each other information on external QA at the same HEI by different agencies, the database would be built on an existing list of HEIs, containing the information required as set out in section 5.3, list 1. The list of HEIs would be managed centrally by EQAR.

The list of HEIs ("perimeter") from ETER (covering 36 of 48 EHEA countries) would be used as a starting point. The information on those HEIs contained in ETER would be updated annually from ETER. There would, however, be a possibility to overwrite this information (i.e. a HEI changed its name or website).

HEIs from ETER would be identified by their ETER ID. (WHED: not sure if they have unique IDs)

For the 12 EHEA countries not contained in ETER, EQAR would acquire a list of officially recognised HEIs from the competent national authority (e.g. ministry of higher education or ENIC-NARIC).

For non-EHEA countries, HEIs would be added on an ad-hoc basis (see below).

Non-ETER HEIs would be identified by an ID generated by EQAR, where possible compatible with future ETER extensions or existing national IDs used in the respective country.

The list of external QA procedures would be based on information provided by the registered agencies.

In order to minimise workload, the list of external QA procedures would generally be composed/updated automatically based on information provided by agencies, without manual intervention by EQAR (except for flags raised by automated checks, see below).

There is a many-to-many relationship between external QA reports and HEIs:

- For one HEI, there can be several external QA reports (from different agencies).
- One external QA report can related to several HEIs (e.g. joint programmes).

While the former case is common, the latter case is occasional, i.e. the vast majority of external QA reports will relate to only one HEI.

All entries in the list of external QA procedures would be identified by an ID, provided by the agency itself or automatically-generated otherwise (whereas the combination of agency and ID will be unique).

In addition to these two main lists, there would be a need for further lists/tables, all of which managed by EQAR, e.g. of:

- Registered agencies
- Names of external QA procedures used by agencies (see item 2.b in section 5.3)
- Countries and territories

Data delivery by registered agencies

Some agencies carry out an extensive number of external QA procedures (i.e. hundreds per year), while others do not carry out more than ten or twenty external QA procedures. The database would thus offer two methods for data delivery by registered agencies:

- Manual entry (and change) via a web interface

- Delivery as an XML file (or in another suitable format)

The web interface would allow the agency to:

1. add information on new external QA reports;

2. consult the list of its external QA reports and modify entries;

3. manage the names of external QA procedures used by the agency (changes subject to confirmation by EQAR).

The database should allow for uploading XML files through the web interface or automatically (e.g. by the agency's own website or database software).

When delivering data as XML file, agencies would be able to add new external QA reports as well as to modify information on existing external QA reports (identified by their unique ID, see above).

The two data delivery methods would be fully interoperable, i.e. agencies can modify information initially submitted in XML through their web interface, or overwrite information initially entered in the web interface through an XML file.

Specifications for XML file format would be developed by the contractor for implementation in consultation with EQAR and registered agencies.

The full external QA report(s) and decision(s) would be delivered as a link or as a PDF file. If delivered as a link, the database software would download a copy of the file(s) to ensure that they will be available permanently for archive purposes.

Identification of HEIs

Given that there will often be several external QA reports by different agencies referring to the same HEI, consistent identification of HEIs is a crucial step.

When information is **provided through the web interface**, agencies would be able to search for an HEI by name or to browse the list by country.

If an existing HEI is selected, it would be internally identified by its (ETER or local) ID.

If the HEI is not found, the agency would be asked to provide the information required (see section 5.3). The information would be entered in the database, but only become public after confirmation by EQAR.

When information is **provided as XML file**, agencies would identify HEIs as follows:

1. By ID (ETER/WHED or local) - preferred

2. By name (English or local language) and website (optional) - otherwise

In the latter case, the database would attempt to match the name and website (if provided) against the existing list of HEIs.

If those match one existing HEI with sufficient certainty, no manual intervention would be needed.

If there is no clear match (e.g. name matches several HEIs, or name does not match any HEI), manual intervention by EQAR would be necessary (confirmation of correct HEI, or completion and confirmation of a new HEI record).

For those cases where the agency knows or assumes that the HEI is not yet contained in the existing list, it should include the information required (see section 4).

Agencies would receive a notification, describing how those cases where HEIs were not identified by ID were resolved.

Frequency

Agencies would be requested to deliver new and updated data as it occurs, i.e. when they have carried out external QA procedures and published reports.

If agencies export data from their own system/database, they should do so at regular intervals, chosen by the agency itself. While this should happen as frequently as possible (i.e. preferably in real-time, daily or weekly), they would be expected to submit data at least quarterly, so as to keep the central database reasonably up-to-date.

There would be a weekly automated report on data submission of agencies to the EQAR Secretariat, allowing it to monitor data submission. Furthermore, there would be automated reminders to agencies who have not delivered any data for more than three months.

Optional features

The following features are optional, and would be considered based on feasibility and additional cost.

Linked Data

When uploading data manually or automatically, agencies would be able to provide information:

- directly (i.e. entered via the web interface, or in the XML file)

- as Linked Data (i.e. providing a link to the agency's own website, containing the required information in machine-readable format)

When provided directly, the agency would need to ensure that the data is updated if necessary. When provided as Linked Data, the data would be cached and checked for updates whenever it is consulted by users.

Third-party compatibility

In addition to delivering data in an XML file according to EQAR's specifications, it would be possible for agencies to submit data in the same format as submitted to an existing initiative where they feed data into. This would be explored for Qrossroads, ANECA's and GAC's databases, since these each cover a relevant number of registered agencies.

> **Use case**: Agencies that already automatically deliver information to an existing database could deliver the same data to the EQAR database without additional effort.

5.6 Quality control

In order to assure quality and consistency of the data, there would be a number of "sanity checks" performed on any data delivered by agencies (no matter through which method).

For every registered agency, there would be a number of specific logic rules, describing expected external QA reports, based on the agency's fields of activity. These would allow the database software to detect if an agency has provided data that is likely to be incorrect, or results from an activity that has not yet been reported to EQAR (e.g. agency normally carrying out only institutional evaluation reports external QA at programme level). The rules would especially assure that external QA reports with the status "part of the obligatory external QA system" are only provided by agencies that are recognised as part of the obligatory external QA system.

These would be a combination of level, status (see section 4 list 2) and country of the HEI, and could look as follows for one agency:

- External QA at PROGRAMME level and PART OF OBLIGATORY EXTERNAL QA status in country X

- External QA at PROGRAMME level and VOLUNTARY status in any country

For data uploaded by QAAs, a number of sanity checks will be performed:

1. Data does not match agency rules – alert and confirmation

2. External QA report in a country where agency was not active before – alert only

3. Data submitted or changed on report more than 1 year old – alert only

4. External QA of programme delivered in another country than HEI's base country – alert only

5. External QA of programme with QF-EHEA level out of HEI's range of levels – alert and confirmation

For data where any of the above applies, the EQAR Secretariat would be notified. For cases marked "alert and confirmation", the information would only be published after confirmation by EQAR. For cases marked "alert only", the information would be published immediately and EQAR would intervene manually only if necessary.

Agencies using the web interface would be warned immediately if their data fails a sanity check, but could proceed with submission, which would then trigger the described process.

Agencies submitting an XML file would receive a notification about data that failed sanity checks.

5.7 Costs

This section addresses both the one-off realisation costs, i.e. the costs of developing a database system according to the present proposal, as well as the long-term costs, i.e. maintaining the database on a permanent basis, once established.

Covering the long-term operational costs is decisive for the database to remain sustainable and up-to-date.

One-off realisation costs

EQAR sought indicative quotes from potential contractors and was able to acquire information from organisations managing existing, similar initiatives (see chapter 3) concerning the costs of setting up a central database as explored in this report.

The realisation costs are based on the following work to be carried out by a contractor:

1. Design of an operational data model and a technical concept for automatic delivery of data by registered agencies

2. Development of backend for use by EQAR and registered agencies

3. Development of publicly-available frontend

Costs of ca **EUR 30 000 – 35 000** should be expected for those services.

Staff time of EQAR is to be considered in addition to that: The dedicated staff time for the database (see following subsection) would be required already during the realisation phase.

Temporarily, some additional staff time would need to be dedicated to the project for a suc-cessful setup phase.

Long-term costs

In the long term, the database will require ongoing technical maintenance as well as sufficient support by the EQAR Secretariat.

		EUR
1.	**Technical maintenance:**	
	a. Web server costs	2 500
	b. Keeping the software up-to-date and secure (service contract)	3 000
	c. Implementing small adjustments to the data model or user interface	2 000
	d. Provision for major change every 5 years	3 000

=> ca. **EUR 10 500 / year**

		Days/year
2.	**Secretariat support:**	
	a. Monitoring whether agencies supply data	13
	b. Maintaining data managed by EQAR (HEI list)	31
	c. Handling data flagged for manual intervention	55
	d. Dealing with questions from agencies and users	21
	e. Oversee technical maintenance and further development	14

=> 134 days/year => roughly 60% FTE staff => ca. **EUR 35 000 / year**

The long-term costs thus amount to ca. EUR 45 000 / year. At the same time, the database would create some synergies. There would, for instance, no longer be a need to collect annual updates from registered agencies, since information on their external QA procedures would already be at EQAR's disposal.

It would thus be feasible to manage the database with a net staff increase of ca. 50% FTE. Together with technical maintenance, this would incur annual costs of ca. **EUR 39 500**, representing ca. 14% of EQAR's current membership fee income.

6. Frequent questions

How would the database be different from existing national and international databases?

EQAR's database would differ in its purpose and coverage. National databases usually cover only the mandatory external QA procedures within one higher education system.

While international databases provide a central access point to higher education institutions from different national systems, quality assurance-related information is often patchy and limited, and they usually do not provide access to external QA reports.

There is currently no database of all external QA procedures officially recognised to be in line with the ESG, by an EQAR-registered agency.

The database would cover cover all external QA within the scope of the ESG and provide adequate system-level information to contextualise the various types of external QA results.

See sections 2.2, 2.5, 2.6, 3.3

What would it mean if a HEI that I am looking for does not appear in the database?

One reason could be that there have not been any external QA procedures of that HEI (or any of its programmes) by any EQAR-registered agency.

Another reason could be that the agency that has evaluated, accredited, reviewed or audited that HEI (or its programmes) has decided not to supply information to the database.

Both scenarios would be clearly identifiable from the statement of scope.

See sections 2.2, 4.1, 4.5, 5.1

Would the database cover external QA of higher education institutions and programmes of EQAR-listed agencies outside of the EHEA?

The database will include information about all higher education institutions and programmes reviewed by EQAR-registered agencies, which would also covers the external QA activities carried out outside EHEA.

While the generic/basic information on such reviews will be available as for any type of reviews, the database will not offer contextualised information about higher education systems outside EHEA, as this would not be within the remit or scope of EQAR.

See section 5.1

What would I be able to access/search for in the database? What information would not be possible to access/search for?

The database will present generic information about the registered agency that carried out the review (name, agencies work, contact), the external review procedure (type of review, link to review report, validity), the higher education institution (name, website, QF levels offered, country) and information of the reviewed programme (only if it was separately reviewed), further contextualised information related to the role of the external quality assurance activity within that national HE system (e.g. whether the external QA activity is part of a mandatory or voluntary procedure) and optionally some additional information may be included referring to the reviewed study programme (QF level, name of the awarded qualification, etc).

As the objective of the database would not be to establish a list or catalogue of all programmes or study opportunities in the EHEA users will not be able to search for a specific study programme but only for the higher education institution where the external quality assurance was carried out.

Since the ESG only apply to higher education (the three cycles described in the QF-EHEA educational institution), all other educational establishments that have been reviewed by an EQAR-registered agencies would not be included in the databases, since those reviews are not within the scope of the ESG.

See sections 4.1, 4.2, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3

Would the database include the list of study programmes for higher education institutions that have a "self-accrediting" status?

In cases where there is no external quality assurance at the programme level (e.g. institutional audits only) information on individual programmes would not be offered via the database as such information are normally not collected by registered agencies. Users can nonetheless refer to the website of the higher education institution to inform themselves about the specific programmes offered by the higher education institution in question.

See sections 2.2, 4.1

How often would the information be updated? Would the database archive information?

Basic information on higher education institutions (e.g. name, website) would be updated at least annually by EQAR.

For those agencies automatically feeding data from their own website or database, the information would normally be instantly updated on the EQAR website, i.e. as soon as the agencies have themselves published it. Those agencies supplying data manually would be requested to update information as it changes.

Archived information would be available to users, including a full history of changes (e.g. name of a HEI, past external QA procedures, etc.).

See sections 4.3, 5.5

What would happen if a higher education institution included in the database would merge with another higher education institution, change its name or close its activities?

The database would be able to automatically update and present the historical changes in the name or external QA of a higher education institution. These updates would normally come from the regular updates based on the ETER list.

See sections 4.5, 5.5

What would happen if a higher education institution ceases its activities although its external quality assurance validity has not expired?

The EQAR database would reflect such changes once they have been communicated and addressed with the concerned quality assurance agency. The agency would normally update their website/list and thus any such information would (automatically) be reflected in the database, while the information would remain available through the archive function.

See sections 4.3, 5.4, 5.5

7. Lists of figures and tables

List of figures

List of tables

8. Annexes

Survey of Potential Users

https://eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/eqar/information/Database/Annex_User_Survey_Database_full_responses.pdf

Survey of Registered QA Agencies

https://eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/eqar/information/Database/Annex_QAA_Survey_Database_full_responses.pdf

Overview of existing databases

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1355MwlHFKqsPjdGAsmGgeJr7w2B-CdRLkssU4eqOSBuQ/edit?usp=sharing