The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education and its Role in European Higher Education

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Quality Assurance in the Bologna Process

Primary responsibility of HE institutions for quality

Founding of EQAR

Cooperation of QA agencies and HE institutions

European Standards and Guidelines

European cooperation in quality assurance

Register of QA agencies

E4 Group

1999	2001	2003	2005	2007	2008
Bologna	Prague	Berlin	Bergen	London	

Outline

1. **What is it and what is it for?**
2. How does it work?
3. Who is using it? And how?

The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)

- EQAR: a register of credible and legitimate QA agencies operating in Europe

- Core criterion: substantial compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG)

- Evidenced through an external review process

- Open to agencies based in Europe or outside

- Voluntary

EQAR – main objectives
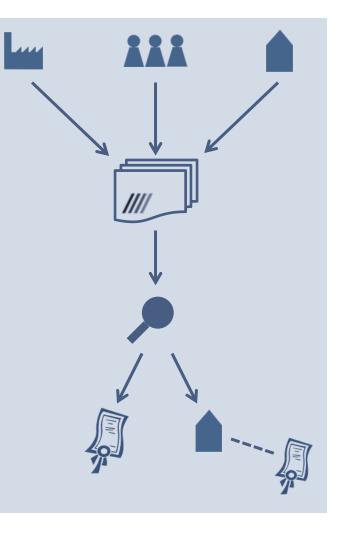
Providing information

- Identify credible quality assurance agencies, and programmes/institutions they reviewed
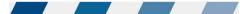- Prevent dubious agencies/"accreditation mills" from gaining credibility

Enhancing trust

- Facilitate recognition of QA results, qualifications and periods of study
- Thereby support mobility

Promoting a European dimension

- Allow HE institutions to choose a suitable QA agency, if national rules permit
- Basis for recognition of accreditation etc.

Important features

- Founded (2008) and managed by the main European stakeholders organisations – E4 Group:
    - Higher ed. Institutions – EUA, EURASHE
    - Quality assurance agencies – ENQA
    - Students – ESU (previously ESIB)
- Under a mandate from the 47 Bologna Process ministers to the E4 Group
- Private law entity
- Crucial, but limited role for governments
- Independent Register Committee, comprising of QA experts nominated by stakeholders
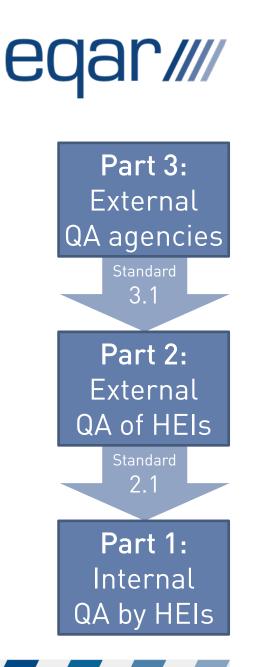
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European Standards and Guidelines for QA (ESG)

eqar ////

- Developed by the E4 Group
- Agreed by ministers within the Bologna Process (Bergen 2005)
- Agreed European principles for quality assurance
  - Common reference points
  - No checklist or detailed directives

Part 3:
External QA agencies

Standard 3.1

Part 2:
External QA of HEIs

Standard 2.1

Part 1:
Internal QA by HEIs

ESG Key Principles for External QA Processes

- External quality assurance builds upon internal quality assurance systems of HE institutions [2.1]

- Criteria and procedures are fit for purpose, pre-defined, transparent and consistent [2.2, 2.3, 2.4]

- Classical model involving self-evaluation, external review, report and follow-up; involvement of students [3.7]

- Leading to a public report [2.5]

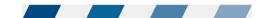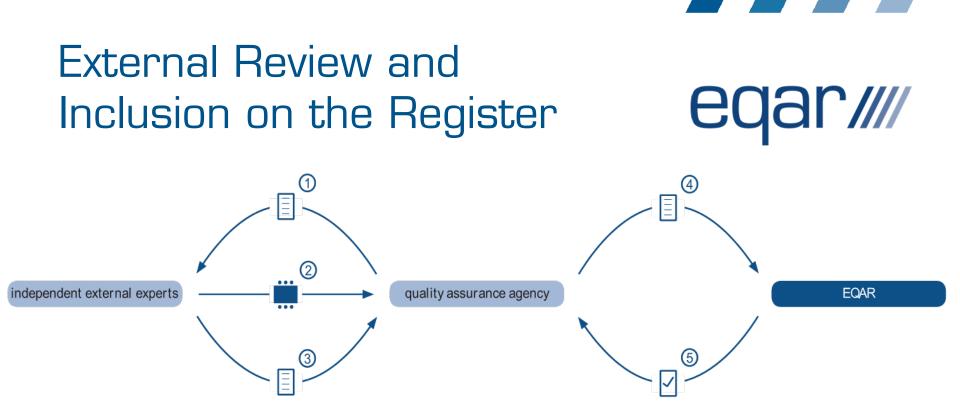- Periodic reviews, follow-up procedures [2.6, 2.7]

ESG Key Principles for QA Agencies

- Official status, external QA as regular activity based on their mission statement [3.2, 3.3, 3.5]

- Sufficient human and financial resources [3.4]

- Carry out system-wide analyses [2.8]

- Operational independence of governments, higher ed. Institutions and stakeholders [3.6]

- Accountability procedures [3.8]

External Review and Inclusion on the Register

1. **self-evaluation** produced by the QA agency
2. **site visit** by independent review team
   (QA professionals, students and academics)
3. external **review report**
4. **application** for inclusion on EQAR
5. **decision** by EQAR Register Committee

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Applications and Registered Agencies

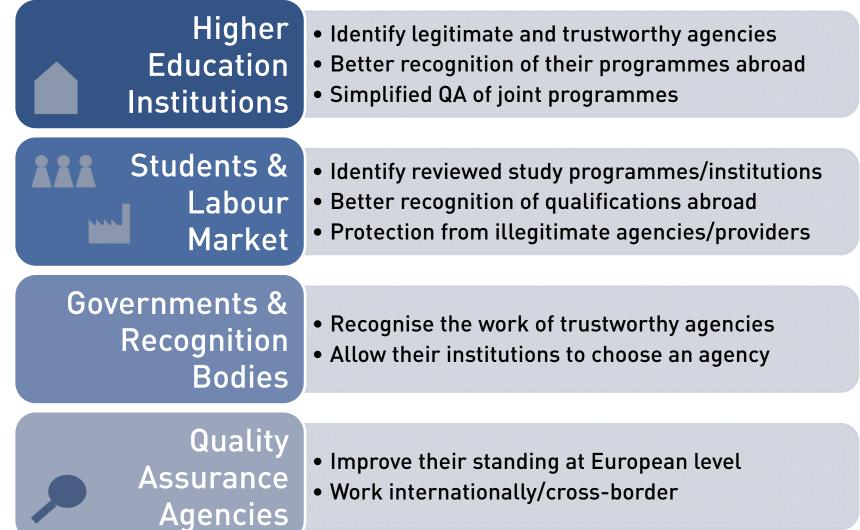| Applications	31
- Accepted	24
- Rejected	3
- Withdrawn	3
- Pending	1

■ Official seat
■ Where agencies also operate
(Listed agencies have been working with HE institutions
in these countries. This does not imply any official recognition or mandate.)

Target groups

eqar ////

Higher Education Institutions

- Identify legitimate and trustworthy agencies
- Better recognition of their programmes abroad
- Simplified QA of joint programmes

Students & Labour Market

- Identify reviewed study programmes/institutions
- Better recognition of qualifications abroad
- Protection from illegitimate agencies/providers

Governments & Recognition Bodies

- Recognise the work of trustworthy agencies
- Allow their institutions to choose an agency

Quality Assurance Agencies

- Improve their standing at European level
- Work internationally/cross-border

Agencies' Motivations for Registration on EQAR

Legend: ▪ not relevant at all ▪ not particularly relevant ▪ rather relevant ▪ very relevant

- Improve reputation internationally
- Facilitate recognition of HEIs/programmes accredited/evaluated/audited by your...
- Fulfil expectations of government(s) and/or stakeholders
- Improve reputation nationally
- Enhance possibilities to accredit/ evaluate/audit HEIs abroad

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

EQAR as Reference for (National) Legislation

- **Denmark I**: automatic recognition of external quality assurance conducted by an EQAR-registered agency for the purpose of approval of Danish degrees offered abroad

- **Denmark II**: recognition of accreditation by EQAR-registered agencies for ERASMUS Mundus joint programmes of Danish and foreign higher ed. institutions

- **Germany**: national regulatory body for QA (Accreditation Council) can ratify decisions from foreign EQAR-registered agencies

EQAR as Reference for (National) Legislation – cont'd

- **Lithuania**: institutional/programme review can be conducted by any EQAR-registered agency as basis for an accreditation decision by the national QA agency

- **Romania**: after initial accreditation by national agency, HE institutions can choose from EQAR-registered agencies freely for periodic evaluation

Not in force, but firm plans:

- **Austria**: plan to allow universities to choose freely from amongst registered agencies for periodic audit

- **Liechtenstein**: no national agency, envisaged that the university choose any EQAR-registered agency to be externally reviewed

Other Users of EQAR

- Students
  - Currently, indirect access to information on quality of higher education
  - However, 20% of visitors to EQAR website are students
- Higher education institutions
  - Direct relevance depends on national legislation
- Recognition bodies
  - Possibility to satisfy themselves about QA of foreign qualifications
  - Also depending on national legislation

Conclusions

- Governments and stakeholders seem to support the organisational

- Most European QA agencies aim for registration

- First governments have started to use EQAR as a reference for different purposes

- QA agencies expect (official) recognition of their work abroad through EQAR
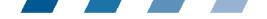
Thank you for your attention!

Contact:

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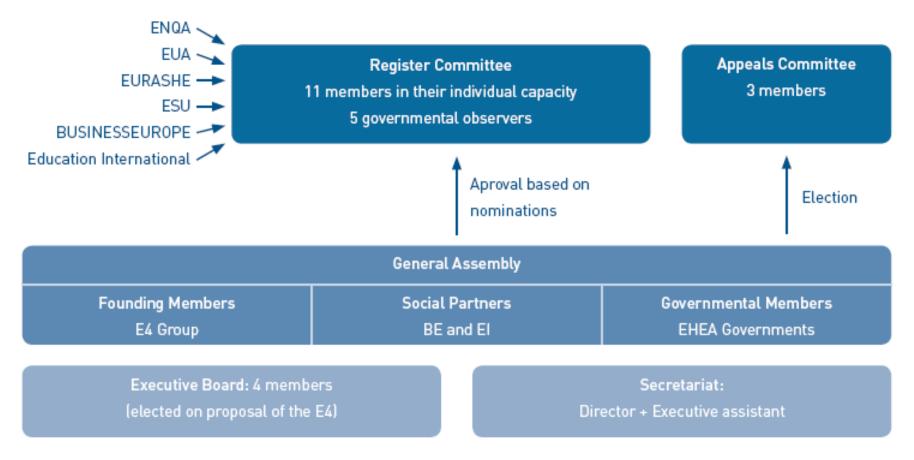# Annex: Website Use

Legend: Visits — Register/Pages

Annex: Organisational Structure

Figure: Structure of EQAR aisbl/ivzw