Working Group 2: External Review of Agencies

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ASEM Expert Seminar on Regional Quality Assurance
Outline

1. About EQAR and its Objectives
2. Findings from EQAR’s Self-Evaluation
3. Challenges Ahead
The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)

- A register of credible and legitimate quality assurance agencies operating in Europe
- Ultimate criterion: substantial compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG)
- Based on external review of the agency
- Registration is voluntary, unless by national law
- Governed by stakeholders and governments jointly, managed by E4 (institutions, students, QA agencies)
EQAR Objectives

Providing Information
- Information on credible and legitimate quality assurance agencies
- Access information on programmes and institutions reviewed by these agencies

Enhancing Trust
- Enhance trust amongst QA agencies, HE institutions and systems, in Europe and internationally
- Prevent dubious agencies and “accreditation mills” from gaining credibility

European Dimension
- Recognition of QA results and decisions, and thus of qualifications and periods of study
- Allow HE institutions to choose a suitable QA agency, if national rules permit
ENQA & EQAR

- **ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education)**
  - Membership-based organisation of QA agencies
  - Representative body at European level
  - Networking, capacity building, policy making etc

- **EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register)**
  - Co-owned by governments and stakeholders
  - Specific responsibility: independently manage a register of QA agencies that comply with the ESG
  - Registered QA agencies are not members
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** according to ESG parts 2 & 3
4. **application** for inclusion on EQAR
5. **decision** by EQAR Register Committee
Applications and Registered Agencies

- Registered: 26
- Applications: 35
- 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.)
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Key Findings from EQAR’s Self-Evaluation

- Organisational structure is by and large supported by governments and stakeholders
- Most European QA agencies aim for registration
- QA agencies expect (official) recognition of their work (and qualifications) abroad through EQAR
- Some governments have started to use EQAR as a reference for different purposes
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**: for joint programmes, nationally-recognised QA agencies 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.

Firm proposals made to parliament:

- **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.
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Challenges Ahead

- Transparency and Communication
  - Does the principle of confidentiality of applications (and thus refusals) benefit EQAR’s aims?
  - How to demonstrate more effectively EQAR’s contribution to the EHEA and European dimension of QA?

- Enhancing the Use and Impact
  - Attractiveness for non-European agencies?
  - How to promote at national level the use of the Register to recognise foreign QA agencies and their decisions?
  - How to monitor the use and impact more systematically?
Thank you for your attention!

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Target Groups

**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