

## Guide for Applicants

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## Forewords

Dear applicants,

Almost five years ago, in September 2003, European ministers of higher education put quality assurance at the centre of the Bologna Process by underlining the importance of European cooperation in quality assurance. They also emphasised the central responsibility that higher education institutions have for assuring and improving quality of higher education.

The ensuing years of thorough discussion amongst higher education institutions, quality assurance agencies, students and other stakeholders have paved the way for agreement on common, genuinely European principles for quality assurance and for the development of a register for quality assurance agencies based on these principles.

The publication of this Guide for Applicants and the official Procedures for Applications mark a milestone in establishing the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR). Building on the work of the E4 Group, who founded EQAR as a new and independent legal entity, EQAR's newly constituted committees have, over the past few months, engaged in intense deliberations. As a result, a set of fair and reliable rules for EQAR's work have been established.

As the Chair of the Register Committee, I am delighted to be able to invite quality assurance agencies from inside and outside Europe to apply for inclusion on EQAR. This is an excellent opportunity for quality assurance agencies to demonstrate their credibility and reliability at European level.

I am convinced that the establishment of EQAR will enhance transparency and accountability of quality assurance in Europe, to the benefit of higher education institutions, students, the labour market and society in general.

Dublin, August 2008

Bryan McMahon  
Chair of the Register Committee

Dear applicants,

The establishment of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) marks an important step towards a European Higher Education Area based on transparency and mutual trust.

On behalf of the Executive Board which brings together representatives of the E4 Group (ENQA, ESU, EUA and EURASHE), I take great pleasure in presenting to you the EQAR Guide for Applicants and would like to encourage quality assurance agencies from within and outside Europe that have undergone an external review process to consider applying for inclusion in the register.

On 4 March 2008 the E4 Group founded EQAR as an organisation managed by the main stakeholders in European higher education, following the endorsement of proposals submitted to the European Ministers of Education meeting in the context of the Bologna Process in May 2007. This is a new and important development in the Bologna Process: not only does EQAR represent the first formal structure established by the Bologna Process, but also its implementation and management have been entrusted to the representative bodies of higher education institutions, students and quality agencies, with governments exercising a more general supervisory function through their membership of EQAR's General Assembly.

The Register Committee, the body that will take decisions on applications received, is composed of independent experts from a variety of different backgrounds. It has, since the establishment of EQAR in March 2008, put considerable effort into the development of the Procedures for Applications and into preparations for dealing with the first applications.

EQAR is a major step forward in building a European Higher Education Area committed to improving the quality, transparency and visibility of our higher education systems. The procedures are now in place, and we look forward to your applications.

Brussels, August 2008

Lesley Wilson  
President of the Executive Board

## 1. Introduction

During spring and summer 2008, the Register Committee developed Procedures for Applications, which provide rules for how EQAR will deal with applications and which stipulate requirements for external reviews of quality assurance agencies. These Procedures for Applications were adopted following consultation of the General Assembly. The General Assembly of EQAR also adopted an Appeals Procedure.

Substantial compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) is the main criterion for inclusion on the register. As the Register Committee makes its decisions on the basis of an external review organised by a third party, the Procedures also stipulate some important requirements for these reviews.

Thus, in order to ensure that it makes its decisions on an appropriate basis, the Register Committee follows a two-step procedure: Only when the requirements set out in the Procedures for Applications are fulfilled does the Register Committee consider the core question of whether an applicant quality assurance agency is in substantial compliance with the ESG.

This Guide for Applicants is intended to serve as an explanation of EQAR's official documents and procedures, gathering all relevant information for applicants in one place. This Guide for Applicants is not a formal document and is not binding. **Only EQAR's Statutes, Procedures for Applications** (see Annex I, p. 20) **and Appeals Procedure** (available on the EQAR website) **shall be binding** for its bodies in processing and deciding upon applications for inclusion on the register.

This Guide is not a final or static document: as appropriate, it will be updated and revised based on the experience EQAR gathers in dealing with applications and in the light of its usefulness for applicants. Therefore, readers are invited to make any comments and suggestions for improvement of this Guide, and to check the EQAR website for updates regularly.

In addition, readers are encouraged to consult the **Frequently Asked Questions** published on the website, which are updated more frequently than the Guide:

<http://www.eqar.eu/application/faq-for-applicants.html>

All official documents, this Guide and further information on EQAR are available on the EQAR website: <http://www.eqar.eu/>

## 2. Context and background

EQAR was founded by the E4 Group, comprising the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the European Students' Union (ESU), the European University Association (EUA) and the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), to increase the transparency of quality assurance in higher education across Europe.

EQAR manages a register of quality assurance agencies that substantially comply with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) to provide the public with clear and reliable information on quality assurance agencies operating in Europe. The register is web-based and freely accessible.

The register is expected to:

- promote student mobility by providing a basis for increasing trust among higher education institutions;
- reduce opportunities for “accreditation mills” to gain credibility;
- provide a basis for governments to authorise higher education institutions to choose any agency from the Register, if that is compatible with national arrangements;
- provide a means for higher education institutions to choose between different agencies, if that is compatible with national arrangements;
- serve as an instrument to improve the quality of agencies and to promote mutual trust among them.

### 2.1 Development of EQAR

The concept of a European register of quality assurance agencies was initially welcomed by the ministers of the Bologna signatory countries in 2005 at their Bergen summit. This first proposal was included in the E4 Group's report proposing “Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area”. They were adopted by ministers as common European reference points for internal and external quality assurance in higher education, including principles for the organisation and work of quality assurance agencies.

At the same time ministers mandated the E4 Group to investigate further the practicalities of setting up a register, based on the newly adopted Standards and Guidelines, and to report back with an operational model two years later. The following two years brought about a broad discussion, involving the relevant stakeholders, on the how to operationalise the concept of a European register of quality assurance agencies. In 2006, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union also expressed their support of the idea to establish a European register of quality assurance agencies in a joint recommendation.

In spring 2007, at the London ministerial meeting, the E4 Group presented a model based on cooperation among key stakeholders in higher education. This model was endorsed by ministers and the E4 was asked to implement their operational model. This led to the formal establishment of EQAR as an independent organisation, managed collectively by the main stakeholders in European higher education, in March 2008.

## **2.2 Structure of EQAR**

EQAR has been founded by the E4 Group as an international non-profit association under Belgian law (AISBL/IVZW) with the objective of independently operating the register of quality assurance agencies.

Members of the association are the four founders, ENQA, ESU, EUA and EURASHE, the social partner organisations represented in the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG), BUSINESSEUROPE and Educational International, and European governments that have decided to support the operation of EQAR and become involved in its governance. The diverse membership of the EQAR Association is reflected in the different rights and responsibilities of the different categories of members.

The EQAR Association has been designed to allow the Register Committee, the body that decides on inclusion of quality assurance agencies on the register, to operate independently, and to ensure certain checks and balances between the different bodies responsible for running the association. The association consists of four bodies with distinct responsibilities:

The General Assembly gathers all members of the association. It is the supreme body of the association and has the authority, for example, to decide on the budget and to elect the Executive Board.

The Executive Board, supported by the Secretariat, is in charge of the daily operation of EQAR. It takes care of all administrative affairs and has the power to represent the EQAR Association legally.

The Register Committee deals with the core objective of EQAR: it is responsible for deciding on applications for inclusion in the Register.

The Appeals Committee considers appeals against a decision of the Register Committee.

### 3. Criteria for inclusion

Quality assurance agencies that wish to be included on the register need to demonstrate that they operate in substantial compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).

#### 3.1 Two-step procedure

Applicants are requested to provide evidence of their substantial compliance through an independent external review of their activities. Such reviews are organised by third parties and are not under EQAR's supervision. In order to enable EQAR to make well-founded decisions, the Procedures for Applications set out some minimum requirements for external reviews. These requirements are explained in [chapter 4](#).

Thus, applications are assessed in a two-step procedure: only if the external review on which the application is based fulfils all requirements (see chapter 4), does the Register Committee proceed to consider the applicant's substantial compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).

#### 3.2 The European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)

In 2005, the ESG were adopted by the Bologna Process ministerial summit in Bergen (Norway). The ESG contain common principles and reference points for quality assurance of higher education in Europe. They are organised in three parts, covering the different levels of quality assurance:

- Part 1: Internal quality assurance within higher education institutions
- Part 2: External quality assurance of higher education
- Part 3: External quality assurance agencies

Naturally, parts 2 and 3 thereof are those with direct relevance to quality assurance agencies and thus serve as criteria for inclusion on the Register. It should, however, be noted that standard 2.1 expects part 1 of the ESG to be considered in external quality assurance activities.

Further information and the full text of the ESG are available from EQAR's website: <http://www.eqar.eu/application/requirements/esg.html>

#### 3.3 Substantial compliance

In order to cope with diverse higher education systems and traditions throughout the 46 Bologna countries, the ESG focus on principles rather than on prescribing procedural details:

*"The standards and guidelines are designed to be applicable to all higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies in Europe, irrespective of their structure, function and size, and the national system in which they are located. [...] it has not been considered appropriate to include detailed "procedures" in the recommendations of this chapter of the report, since institutional and agency procedures are*

*an important part of their autonomy. It will be for the institutions and agencies themselves, co-operating within their individual contexts, to decide the procedural consequences of adopting the standards contained in this report.” (ESG p. 11f.)*

Bearing this in mind, the ESG can obviously not be used as a check list. EQAR expects applicants to be in substantial compliance with the ESG: that is, if a standard is not fulfilled by the letter of the law, the applicant might still be considered substantially compliant if the stipulated principle is appropriately respected in practice.

The different standards are often linked to each other and there is sometimes considerable overlap between them. Furthermore, some standards are much broader than others. The Register Committee therefore makes a holistic judgement on an applicant's substantial compliance with the ESG, rather than following any automatic quantitative rules.

### **3.4 ENQA membership**

Full membership of ENQA is normally considered as satisfactory evidence for substantial compliance with the ESG since agencies also need to evidence their substantial compliance with the ESG in order to become full member of ENQA.

Considering that those agencies and their external review processes have undergone sound scrutiny by ENQA, the Register Committee can build upon ENQA's prior work to some extent: for instance, if ENQA has already addressed certain questions, EQAR might use this as a starting point and might be able to solve certain issues more efficiently.

## 4. External review

The Register Committee will make its decisions based on the information provided in the external review report.

The nature of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) makes it difficult to assess an agency's compliance based just on papers, application forms or correspondence. Reaching a decision on whether or not an activity, or a certain way of doing things, can be considered substantially compliant with the ESG is a complex process and the external review is a crucial element in arriving at such judgements.

Thus it is of utmost importance that the external review is sound and reliable, and provides the Register Committee with sufficient information. As these reviews are organised by third parties outside any supervision by EQAR, the Procedures for Applications stipulate some important requirements that external reviews have to fulfil in order to be acceptable to the Register Committee. These are summarised below.

### 4.1 Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference for an external review should normally be agreed between the applicant and the review coordinator (see below) in advance. This ensures that all parties involved are clear about their roles and responsibilities and that the review process is properly defined.

The Terms of Reference should at least define the purpose of the external review, the composition of the review panel and outline key steps in the review process.

The EQAR Secretariat is at applicants' disposal to answer questions with regard to EQAR's rules and requirements that may arise when planning an external review.

### 4.2 Purpose

For inclusion on the register, the applicant's compliance with the ESG is considered. An assessment of the level of compliance with the ESG should therefore be clearly defined as one purpose of the external review.

In some cases, however, a review might also have other purposes, such as an independent overall assessment of the applicant's performance. Such a review with additional purposes might as well be used for an application to EQAR.

### 4.3 Principle of independence

The external review needs to be conducted in an objective and unbiased manner. The review coordinator and the review panel need to be completely independent from the applicant. It has to be ensured that

neither the review coordinator nor any review panel member has a conflict of interest.

EQAR attaches high importance to the independence of the external review as it has to rely on the results written down in the review report and the judgements made by the review panel. For that reason the review coordinator is required to sign an explicit No-conflict-of-interest Declaration (see “[Application documents](#)” below).

#### **4.4 Review coordinator**

The review coordinator is the organisation that conducts the practical organisation of the review process and is sometimes also referred to as “sponsor”. EQAR will not coordinate reviews itself.

The external review might be initiated or commissioned by a national authority (for example by the ministry of higher education) or by the applicant itself.

In the former case, the national authority might itself be the review coordinator (so-called “nationally-coordinated review” or “national review”) or commission a third party as review coordinator. In the latter case the applicant itself has to identify a suitable review coordinator, a common example is a review coordinated by ENQA on request of a quality assurance agency.

The review coordinator plays an important role in developing Terms of Reference, recruiting an independent review panel and being responsible for the overall management of the review process. The coordinator also has to provide appropriate guidance to the review panel throughout the whole process.

Therefore it is crucial that the review coordinator is completely independent from the applicant, to guarantee an unbiased and objective process. Furthermore, the coordinator must have the necessary professional capacity to organise an external review, so that it can adequately fulfil all its responsibilities.

#### **4.5 Review panel**

The review panel should consist of at least four persons. Those need to be fully independent from the applicant and should possess sufficient knowledge, expertise and experience to review the applicant’s compliance with the ESG. The roles of Chair and Secretary are often foreseen amongst the review panel members.

The review panel should comprise of members who represent a broad range of expertise and who cover the perspectives of the different stakeholders in higher education. At least one academic staff member and one student of a higher education institution must be part of the review panel.

To ensure an international dimension at least one review panel member must come from a country other than the applicant's.

In order to safeguard the independence of review, review panel members must have no conflict of interest in exercising their role.

#### **4.6 Report**

The external review report needs to provide sufficient evidence of the applicant's substantial compliance with the ESG. The Register Committee's decisions are primarily based on the external review report, the quality and reliability of which are therefore of crucial importance.

The report should clearly address each relevant ESG (standards 2.1 to 2.8 and 3.1 to 3.8) and reflect on the agency's compliance with it.

Depending on the purpose of the external review (see above), the report might contain further analysis and judgements.

The review report should be agreed amongst all review panel members, although it might well contain majority judgements or opinions on certain issues.

The review panel should provide the applicant with the draft report for comment on factual errors before it is finally agreed upon. Should the applicant still have comments on the final report, those may well be submitted to EQAR with the application.

The review report should be submitted to EQAR and should include all annexes and dissenting opinions, where such exist.

## 5. Application process

The Register Committee decides on inclusion of a quality assurance agency following a formal application. The Procedures for Applications set out the application process described below. It aims to be clear, transparent and fair.

### 5.1 Application documents

A complete application comprises of the following documents:

- **Application Form**

Please make sure that the Application Form is duly completed and signed by a person authorised to engage legally the applicant vis-à-vis third parties.

- **Further Information Sheet**

The Further Information Sheet should be completed to provide EQAR with all necessary information to be published in case the application is successful.

- **No-conflict-of-interest Declaration**

The No-conflict-of-interest Declaration needs to be duly completed and signed by the review coordinator.

- **Terms of Reference of the external review**

- **Self-evaluation report** provided for the external review

- **External review report**

The external review report is expected to be published by the applicant before making its application.

The following documents are optionally included:

- **Applicant's statement** on the external review report (if any)

- For ENQA full members: **Confirmation letter (or equivalent proof of ENQA membership)**; including prior correspondence between the applicant and ENQA, if any

EQAR will treat all documents except the external review report and the Further Information Sheet as confidential and will not disclose them to third parties, unless obliged to do so by law.

All forms are available from the EQAR website and are shown in [Annex II](#) of this Guide.

### 5.2 Supplementary documentation

In addition to the documents mentioned above, applicants might wish to include supplementary documents in their application for inclusion on the Register. This might be appropriate especially where changes have been introduced after the completion of the external review on which

the application is based, or where recommended improvements have already been implemented.

Applicants should, however, bear in mind that, as a rule, the external review report serves as the main basis for EQAR's decision making. Therefore, supplementary documentation should only be as extensive as necessary, and remain as concise as possible. Supplementary documentation should add to the analysis in the external review report, and should not replace it.

### **5.3 Language**

Please note that all documents mentioned above have to be submitted in English. If original documents are in another language the applicant is expected to arrange for their translation.

### **5.4 Format and submission of applications**

The Application Form needs to be sent by regular mail or fax. The submission of the signed Application Form constitutes a contractual relationship.

All other application documents (see [5.1](#)) should be sent by email. In order to ensure readability across all platforms and to prevent any unintentional modifications, all documents should be sent as PDF files (Portable Document Format).

### **5.5 Deadlines**

The Register Committee will convene approximately twice a year. Before each meeting there will be a deadline for which complete applications must have reached the Secretariat in order to be considered at that meeting. The deadlines will be published on EQAR's website.

### **5.6 Requests for information or clarification**

Rapporteurs are assigned to each application in order to prepare the Register Committee's deliberations. In some cases, rapporteurs might request additional information or clarification of information from the applicant before the Register Committee considers the application at its meeting.

This happens if a request can be plausibly answered in a 2 – 3 week period. If such a request is made, it usually reaches the applicant about 3 – 4 weeks after the application deadline.

If a request is referred to the review coordinator or the review panel, the applicant will also receive a copy for information.

### **5.7 Response, possibility of withdrawal**

Following consideration of application by the Register Committee, the applicant will receive an official response by EQAR, normally about two months after the application deadline.

There are three possible responses:

1. If the Register Committee admits the applicant to the Register, this is confirmed in writing. The applicant will be able to preview its entry on the Register a few days before publication and will be invoiced for the listing fee.
2. The Register Committee might request further information or clarification from the applicant, the review coordinator or the review team. The applicant will receive a copy of any request for information sent to the review coordinator or the review team.
3. If the Register Committee considers rejection, the applicant will receive an account of the grounds for which rejection is considered. The applicant will be invited to make additional representation before the Register Committee takes a final decision.

In cases 2 and 3, the application remains to have a pending status until the subsequent meeting of the Register Committee. Applicants are usually granted a deadline of 2 – 3 months to submit additional information or make additional representation, respectively. The applicant has the possibility to withdraw the application before the stipulated deadline. Should EQAR not receive any notice by the deadline this will be deemed a withdrawal of the application. The Register Committee will not take any decisions on withdrawn applications.

## 5.8 Rejection

If an application is rejected, the applicant will be notified of the grounds for rejection in writing (see chapter 8 for the possibility of appeal).

A re-application will normally only be possible after a 3-year period and has to be based on a new external review. The Register Committee might however invite a rejected applicant to re-apply earlier and/or without a new external review in individual cases. This will be specified in the rejection letter.

## 5.9 Reporting obligation

All agencies listed on the register are obliged to inform EQAR of their own accord if any changes to their legal status, their statutes, their processes or methodology or any other substantial aspect of their work occur.

## 5.10 Fees

Applicants will be charged two types of fees: an application fee and an annual listing fee.

After submission of an application you will receive an invoice for the application fee. The application fee is not refundable.

Once approved, the annual listing fee must be paid for each year of inclusion on the register. Agencies will receive an invoice for each calendar year (for the first time a few weeks after their inclusion, then in the beginning of each year) requesting payment of the listing fee for full months included on the register in the respective year.

For instance, an agency included from 15.4.2010 until 31.5.2012 would receive the following invoices (excl. VAT):

2010: 8 full months (May – December)	633,33 €
2011: full year	950,00 €
2012: 5 full months (January – May)	395,83 €

Applicants that have their registered office in a state party to the European Cultural Convention will be charged the reduced “European” fee. All other applicants will be charged the “Others” fee.

The following fees will be charged:

	European		Others	
	ex. VAT	incl. VAT	ex. VAT	incl. VAT
<b>application fee</b>	950,00 €	1 149,50 €	1 900,00 €	2 299,00 €
<b>listing fee</b>	950,00 €	1 495,00 €	1 900,00 €	2 299,00 €

## 6. No-conflict-of-interest policy

EQAR attaches high importance to avoiding any conflict of interest of review panel members, review coordinators and members of its own decision-making bodies.

With regard to review coordinators and review panel members, EQAR Procedures stipulate, as a general rule, that they need to be independent and without conflict of interest. With regard to members of EQAR bodies involved in decision making on applications (Register Committee and, in case of appeals, Appeals Committee), the rules mention a few examples of who might be considered having a conflict of interest:

- Employees or consultants of an applicant, as well as members of a statutory body
- Members of the review panel reviewing an applicant
- Those holding a position in an higher education institution or programme currently under review by the applicant

These are examples and there might be further circumstances that constitute a conflict of interest. Also, a person who has been in a situation as mentioned above until very recently or has a close relative who is in such a situation might have a conflict of interest.

As a general rule, EQAR expects all involved parties (applicants, review coordinators, review panels and members of its statutory bodies) to address (potential) conflicts of interest of their own accord.

### 6.1 Review coordinators and review panels

In cases where the applicant itself initiates or commissions its external review, it is the applicant's responsibility to identify a review coordinator who is sufficiently independent and without conflict of interest. In cases where a national authority coordinates the review or commissions an organisation to coordinate the review, it is the authority's responsibility to ensure independence.

In their Application Form, applicants will be requested to declare in writing that the review coordinator is sufficiently independent from them.

The review coordinator bears the responsibility to ensure the independence of all review panel members. It is expected to take appropriate measures to avoid recruiting any review panel members who might have a conflict of interest.

The review coordinator will be required to declare, using the No-conflict-of-interest Declaration, that appropriate measures to avoid any conflict of interest of the review panel were taken and that the coordinator has no conflict of interest itself.

## **6.2 EQAR decision-making bodies**

Members of EQAR's decision-making bodies who have a (potential) conflict of interest are expected to refrain from taking part in the decision-making process and to declare this of their own accord.

Should an applicant, a review coordinator or a review panel member consider a member of an EQAR body to have a conflict of interest, this should be addressed to the President of the EQAR Executive Board, either directly or via the EQAR Secretariat.

## **6.3 Confidentiality**

Despite the general rule that a conflict of interest should be addressed of the person's own accord, there might be cases where an applicant or person involved in the review considers an involved person or a member of an EQAR body to have a conflict of interest.

If that is the case, the person is encouraged to bring this to the attention of the EQAR Secretariat or the President of the EQAR Executive Board. Confidentiality will be ensured, in particular the identity of a person reporting about another person's potential conflict of interest will not be disclosed without his/her consent.

## 7. Exceptional circumstances

Whereas the inclusion of an agency on the register is usually valid for 5 years from the date external review report has been completed, earlier re-consideration of a listed agency might be necessary in exceptional circumstances.

### 7.1 Reasons for “out-of-sequence” action

There are two reasons that might lead to a re-consideration of an agency’s inclusion before the 5-year period has elapsed:

1. The initial decision to admit an agency was substantially flawed, either by a substantial procedural error or by being based on false facts or evidence.
2. Substantial changes in the agency’s status or operation have led to a situation in which the agency no longer substantially complies with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).

If the Register Committee initiates reconsideration, the agency concerned will be notified.

### 7.2 Possible consequences

If a reconsideration is initiated the agency concerned will be asked to make representation on the matters of concern before any decision is taken.

The Register Committee may take one of the following decisions:

1. If the criteria for inclusion were not fulfilled when the initial decision (to include the agency) was made, the inclusion may be declared “void ab initio”. That is, the agency is removed from the register immediately and is deemed to have never been rightfully included.
2. If the criteria for inclusion are evidently no longer fulfilled (for example, due to a substantial change of the agency’s methodology that is in obvious contradiction with the ESG’s principles) the agency may be removed from the register.
3. If there are substantial concerns about the agency’s compliance with the ESG, but it is not possible to judge clearly whether or not the agency still fulfils the criteria, the remaining period of inclusion on the register may be reduced, thus triggering a need for an earlier external review.
4. If the concerns reveal to be unsubstantiated or minor, the Register Committee may conclude the reconsideration with no further action.

## **8. Appeals Procedure**

Applicants may appeal decisions of the Register Committee on procedural grounds or in case of perversity of judgement. The Appeals Committee has the responsibility to consider appeals.

### **8.1 Grounds of appeal**

The allowed grounds of appeal are limited to procedural grounds and perversity of judgement. Mere disagreement with the Register Committee's judgement does not constitute a valid ground of appeal.

An appeal on procedural grounds may be lodged if EQAR's Statutes, procedures or regulations, any applicable legislation or generally accepted principles of fair and equal procedures were violated.

Perversity of judgement may be claimed if a decision is clearly unreasonable or disproportionate in the light of the available evidence, for example in that evidence that was at EQAR's disposal had not been duly considered.

### **8.2 Possible consequence**

If the Appeals Committee accepts the appeal, the Register Committee's decision is voided and the case referred back to the Committee. The Register Committee will take due account of the grounds of appeal and the reasoning of the Appeals Committee in taking a new decision.

An appeal is rejected if it is either unsubstantiated or not based on valid grounds.

### **8.3 Process**

Appeals need to be submitted to EQAR in writing within 90 days of being notified of the rejection of an application. The appeal has to clearly specify on which grounds it is lodged. The Appeals Committee will decide on the appeal within 120 days.

Before taking a decision the Appeals Committee might request clarification or comments on the grounds of appeal from the Register Committee, the review coordinator, the review panel or the applicant.

## Annex I. Procedures for Applications

[of 6 August 2008]

Definition of terms:

“**Register**” hereinafter refers to the register of quality assurance agencies published by EQAR.

“**Applicant**” hereinafter refers to a quality assurance agency that seeks inclusion on the register.

“**Listed agency**” hereinafter refers to a quality assurance agency that has been admitted to the register by the Register Committee.

“**External review**” hereinafter refers to a review of a quality assurance agency’s work by an “**external review panel**”, coordinated by a “**review coordinator**”.

“**External review report**” hereinafter refers to the written report that has been agreed by the review panel following completion of the external review.

“**Self-evaluation report**” hereinafter refers to the report compiled by the applicant for consideration by the external review panel.

In accordance with article 16 b. of the Statutes the Register Committee, after consultation of the General Assembly at its meeting on 25 June 2008, has agreed the following Procedures for Applications:

### I. General provisions

#### Art. 1 – Criteria for inclusion

To be included in the Register, applicants need to demonstrate that they operate in substantial compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, as adopted by the European ministers responsible for higher education in Bergen on 20 May 2005, or any succeeding document (hereafter referred to as “ESG”), attested through an external review in line with the requirements stipulated in part II of these Procedures.

#### Art. 2 – ENQA membership

Full membership of ENQA normally constitutes satisfactory evidence for substantial compliance with the ESG.

#### Art. 3 – Applications

- (1) All applications shall consist of the following documents in English:
  - a. Application form
  - b. Terms of reference of the review

- c. Self-evaluation report that has been submitted for the external review
  - d. External review report<sup>1</sup>
  - e. Applicant's statement on the external review report, if applicable
  - f. Documentation of the applicant's application for ENQA membership including documentation supporting the reasons for approval, if applicable
  - g. Any other documents relevant to the application
- (2) The external review report shall be published by the applicant before application. All other documents shall be treated as confidential by EQAR and shall not be disclosed to any third parties.
- (3) An application fee shall be charged pursuant to art. 22 (2) of the Statutes.

#### **Art. 4 – Process**

- (1) Applications shall be submitted to the Secretariat in writing.
- (2) The Applicant can withdraw the application any time before the stipulated deadline for submission of additional information (cf. art. 9 (2)) or for making additional representation to the Register Committee (cf. art. 10 (2)), but not thereafter.

### **I.External reviews**

#### **Art. 5 – General provisions and coordination**

- (1) The Applicant's substantial compliance with the ESG needs to be evidenced through an external review by an independent expert panel according to the provisions of these Procedures.
- (2) EQAR will not organise nor coordinate reviews itself. It will rely on reviews coordinated by a recognised national authority or another organisation that has the necessary professional capacity<sup>2</sup> (including, for instance, ENQA). The review should be conducted in an unbiased, objective and independent manner.
- (3) The review coordinator shall be independent of the applicant.
- (4) The coordinator should provide the review panel with appropriate guidelines for exercising its role.
- (5) The review coordinator and the applicant should agree on the terms of reference.

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<sup>1</sup> The report will be expected to be reasonably up to date. Inclusion will be valid for 5 years from the date of the review report. (cf. art. 11 (1))

<sup>2</sup> The Register Committee will verify on a case-by-case basis whether the review coordinator has the necessary professional capacity. Applicants who are in doubt whether a potential review coordinator would be acceptable are invited to approach EQAR for consideration in advance.

#### **Art. 6 – Review panel**

- (1) The review panel shall consist of at least four persons. The panel members should possess sufficient knowledge, experience and expertise to be able to understand, analyse and judge the applicant's activities.
- (2) The review panel members shall represent a range of expertise, covering the different perspectives of the key stakeholders and comprising of at least an academic staff member and a student from a higher education institution.
- (3) At least one review panel member shall be from a country other than that of the applicant.
- (4) The members of the review panel shall be sufficiently independent from the applicant to be able to exercise their role objectively and without conflict of interest.

#### **Art. 7 – Self-evaluation report**

The self-evaluation report shall reflect on the applicant's compliance with the ESG. It should be a critical reflection on the activities, strengths and weaknesses of the applicant and the added value they provide for quality improvement of higher education institutions.

#### **Art. 8 – External review report**

- (1) The external review report shall provide sufficient evidence of the applicant's compliance with the ESG. It should encompass a summary of evidence, an analysis and a conclusion for each of the standards.
- (2) The external review report shall be agreed upon by all external review panel members. It should be submitted together with all annexes and dissenting opinions where such exist.

### **I. Decision making on applications**

#### **Art. 9 – Basis for decision making**

- (1) Without prejudice to par. 2 and art. 10 (2), the Register Committee shall make its decision based on the documents filed with the application.
- (2) In case of a substantial lack of relevant information or need for clarification, EQAR may request further information from the coordinator of the review. In exceptional cases EQAR may request further information from the applicant or the review panel. An appropriate deadline shall be granted for additional responses. Failure on the part of the applicant to submit requested information within the stipulated deadline shall be deemed as withdrawal of the application.

#### **Art. 10 – Possible decisions**

- (1) The Register Committee can decide to admit an applicant to the Register or to reject the application.
- (2) Before a final decision to reject an application is taken, the applicant shall be notified of the grounds for possible rejection and have the

possibility to make additional representation to the Register Committee within an appropriate deadline. Failure on the part of the applicant to make additional representation within the deadline shall be deemed as withdrawal of the application.

- (3) Applicants shall be notified of all decisions in writing, including an account of the reasons for admission or rejection.
- (4) An unsuccessful applicant may only reapply after a 3-year period has elapsed from the date of the external review report and such an application shall be based on a new external review, unless the Register Committee invites the unsuccessful applicant to reapply earlier and/or without a new external review, as appropriate.

#### **Art. 11 – Validity of decisions**

- (1) Following admission, the applicant shall be included in the Register for five years from the date the external review report has been completed.
- (2) An annual listing fee shall be charged pursuant to art. 22 (2) of the Statutes.
- (3) Provided that an application for renewal (including an external review report) is submitted to EQAR within one month of the expiry of inclusion, a listed agency may remain on the Register until the Register Committee decides on the application for renewal.
- (4) A listed agency can withdraw from the Register at any time.

#### **Art. 12 – Exceptional circumstances**

- (1) A listed agency shall notify EQAR of its own accord about changes to its legal form and status, amendments to its statutes and substantial changes in its process or methodology.
- (2) The Register Committee shall reconsider its decision to admit a listed agency if substantial procedural errors were made in reaching the initial decision, the initial decision was based on false facts or evidence, or there are serious concerns that the listed agency no longer fulfils the criteria for inclusion.
- (3) The listed agency concerned shall be notified if a reconsideration is initiated.
- (4) The Register Committee may
  - a. declare its decision void ab initio if the criteria for inclusion were evidently not fulfilled when the decision was made; or
  - b. exclude a listed agency if it evidently no longer fulfils the criteria for inclusion, as from the date on which it ceased to fulfil the criteria; or
  - c. reduce the remaining validity period of the listed agency's inclusion, as appropriate, if there are serious concerns about the applicant's fulfilment of the criteria and the Register

Committee considers it impossible to make a judgement without a new review.

- (5) The listed agency concerned shall be granted the right to make representation to the Register Committee before any decision is taken with an appropriate deadline of not less than 30 days. The listed agency shall be notified of the decision and its grounds.

#### **Art. 13 – Publication**

- (1) In case of admission to the Register, the following information shall be published on the EQAR's website:
  - a. name and contact details of the agency
  - b. decision of the Register Committee including the main reasons and the duration of inclusion
  - c. country in which the agency is established
  - d. information on the agency's quality assurance activities
  - e. countries within which the agency operates
  - f. ENQA membership status of the agency
  - g. web links to its external review report
  - h. web links to the agency's reports and publications
- (2) The Register Committee may adopt indicators for substantial compliance to illustrate EQAR's criteria for potential applicants. The indicators would be illustrative and not binding.
- (3) The Register Committee may include anonymous summaries of its decisions in its annual reports in order to provide examples of compliance and non-compliance to future applicants.

#### **I. Further provisions**

#### **Art. 14 – No conflict of interest policy**

- (1) A member of the Register Committee who has a conflict of interest with regard to a particular application may not take part in processing or making decisions on it. A member is assumed to have a conflict of interest if, for example:
  - a. s/he receives financial compensation from the applicant as an employee, consultant or subcontractor;
  - b. s/he holds a position, whether paid or unpaid, with the applicant, for example as a member of a commission or board;
  - c. s/he was involved in the external review of the applicant;
  - d. s/he holds a position in an entity<sup>3</sup> currently being reviewed by the applicant;

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<sup>3</sup> The term "entity" may refer to any functional or organisational unit that is subject to quality review, such as a higher education institution, a department or a


- e. any of the above applies to a close relative of the person;
  - f. any of the above applied until recently;
- (2) A member is expected to declare a conflict of interest of his/her own accord.
  - (3) Applicants shall notify the President of the Executive Board if they consider that a member of the Register Committee has a conflict of interest with regard to their application.
  - (4) Any disputes shall be settled by the President of the Executive Board in consultation with the Chair of the Register Committee.

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study programme; it does not necessarily refer to a legal entity or require any particular degree of organisation.

## Annex II. Application forms

These forms are for illustration. Please use the forms from <http://www.eqar.eu/application/forms.html> for making an application.

**eqar** 

Please send this form by fax (+32 2 230 57 51) or regular mail.

### Application for inclusion in the register

An agency that applies for inclusion in the register must complete the following form, which must be signed by an authorised representative.

**Official name**  
Address

VAT Number (if existing, for applicants from EU countries)

**Contact person**  
Phone  
E-Mail

**Authorised representative**  
Phone  
E-Mail

**ENQA membership**  Full member  Candidate member  Other or no status (if full member) Our membership was granted (or reconfirmed) on the basis of the same external review as the one on which this application is based:  Yes  No

I, as authorised representative of the Applicant, declare that the external review on which this application is based is up-to-date, adequately reflects our work and has been coordinated by an organisation (hereafter "coordinator") independent from us. To our knowledge, neither the coordinator nor the review team members had a conflict of interest.


I acknowledge and agree with the following terms and conditions:

- This application shall be considered in accordance with the provisions of EQAR's Statutes and Procedures for Applications. Any disputes concerning the Register Committee's decisions shall be settled in accordance with the EQAR Statutes and Appeals Procedure. The place of jurisdiction shall be Belgium.
- The external review report and the information mentioned in the Further Information Sheet will be made public on the EQAR website if this application is successful.
- EQAR will not process this application before payment of the application fee according to the published Application and Listing Fees.
- The Applicant shall inform EQAR about any changes to its legal form and status, amendments to its statutes and substantial changes in its process or methodology.

Place, Date \_\_\_\_\_ Signature of the authorised representative \_\_\_\_\_

**Please do not forget to send** by email (to [info@eqar.eu](mailto:info@eqar.eu) as PDF) or in 18 paper copies:

Further Information Sheet  No-conflict-of-interest Declaration  
 Self-evaluation report  Terms of Reference of the external review  
 External review report  Comments on external review report, if any  
 Documentation of ENQA membership, if applicable

**eqar** 

### No-conflict-of-interest Declaration

This form should be completed by the "Review Coordinator", that is, the organisation coordinating the external review of the Applicant.

**Review Coordinator:**

**Official name**  
Address

**Contact person**  
Phone  
E-Mail

**Authorised representative**  
Phone  
E-Mail

**Applicant:**

**Official name**  
Address

**Review Team:**


**Chair:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Secretary:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Further members:** \_\_\_\_\_

I, as the authorised representative of the Review Coordinator specified above, hereby declare that the organisation I represent:

- is independent from the Applicant and had no conflict of interest in coordinating the external review;
- coordinated the external review objectively and without bias;
- took appropriate measures to ensure the independence of the Review Team members (named above) and that, to the knowledge of the organisation I represent, there is no reason to believe that any Review Team member had a conflict of interest.

Place, Date \_\_\_\_\_ Signature of the authorised representative \_\_\_\_\_

**eqar** 

Please send this form by email ([info@eqar.eu](mailto:info@eqar.eu)).

### Further Information Sheet

This form should be completed by applicants. Applicants are fully responsible for the accuracy of the information provided, which is accepted as bona fide by EQAR.

**Applicant** \_\_\_\_\_

**Information to be published in the register**

**Agency website**  
Direct link to review reports

**Contact person**  
Phone  
Fax  
E-Mail


Please keep the information below as brief and concise as possible so as to be helpful for users of the register.

**Brief general description**  
(max. 5-6 lines)

**Specialisation**  
if applicable, e.g. subject area or professional sector  
(max. 5-6 lines)

**Types/Methods of quality assurance used**  
(max. 5-6 lines)

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**eqar** 

Please send this form by email ([info@eqar.eu](mailto:info@eqar.eu)).

### Further Information Sheet

**Countries in which the agency operates**

**Please note:** This will not imply any official recognition or endorsement of activities undertaken in those countries. Applicants are, however, expected to duly respect the European Standards and Guidelines in all countries in which they operate.

<input type="checkbox"/> Albania	<input type="checkbox"/> Andorra
<input type="checkbox"/> Armenia	<input type="checkbox"/> Austria
<input type="checkbox"/> Azerbaijan	<input type="checkbox"/> Belgium
<input type="checkbox"/> Bosnia and Herzegovina	<input type="checkbox"/> Bulgaria
<input type="checkbox"/> Croatia	<input type="checkbox"/> Cyprus
<input type="checkbox"/> Czech Republic	<input type="checkbox"/> Denmark
<input type="checkbox"/> Estonia	<input type="checkbox"/> Finland
<input type="checkbox"/> France	<input type="checkbox"/> Georgia
<input type="checkbox"/> Germany	<input type="checkbox"/> Greece
<input type="checkbox"/> Holy See	<input type="checkbox"/> Hungary
<input type="checkbox"/> Iceland	<input type="checkbox"/> Ireland
<input type="checkbox"/> Italy	<input type="checkbox"/> Latvia
<input type="checkbox"/> Liechtenstein	<input type="checkbox"/> Lithuania
<input type="checkbox"/> Luxembourg	<input type="checkbox"/> Malta
<input type="checkbox"/> Moldova	<input type="checkbox"/> Montenegro
<input type="checkbox"/> Netherlands	<input type="checkbox"/> Norway
<input type="checkbox"/> Poland	<input type="checkbox"/> Portugal
<input type="checkbox"/> Romania	<input type="checkbox"/> Russia
<input type="checkbox"/> Serbia	<input type="checkbox"/> Slovakia
<input type="checkbox"/> Slovenia	<input type="checkbox"/> Spain
<input type="checkbox"/> Sweden	<input type="checkbox"/> Switzerland
<input type="checkbox"/> "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"	<input type="checkbox"/> Turkey
<input type="checkbox"/> Ukraine	<input type="checkbox"/> United Kingdom

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## Annex III. Specimen entry

### //// Specimen agency for accreditation in Central Europe (SPACE)

#### Musteragentur für Akkreditierung in Zentraleuropa

Website: [www.space.com](http://www.space.com)  
Admission valid until: 2013-02-28 (listed since 2008-07-07)  
Based in\*: Slovenia

#### Contact details

Address: Celovska cesta 10  
1000 Ljubljana  
Slovenija  
Contact Person: Anna Mustermann  
Phone: +386 1 225 21 00  
+386 1 225 21 01  
Fax: +386 1 225 99 99  
Email: [anna@space.com](mailto:anna@space.com)

#### Information on the agency's work

SPACE was founded in 1992 as a regional agency for quality assurance in Central Europe. After initially operating in Austria, Czech Republic and Slovenia SPACE has since widened its activities to numerous additional countries.

Agency operates in\*\*: Germany; Austria; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Croatia; Czech Republic; Hungary; Liechtenstein; Switzerland; Slovakia; Slovenia  
Specialisation: SPACE is specialised on higher education programmes in the **sector of aeronautics**.  
Types/Methods of quality assurance used: SPACE normally provides accreditation (based on self-evaluation and peer review) at the level of study programmes.  
For departments or institutions that already had at least one programme accredited by SPACE it also provides institutional accreditation.  
Review reports: [www.space.com/review/programme/reports.html](http://www.space.com/review/programme/reports.html)  
ENQA membership: ENQA full member since May 2008  
Report(s):

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\* This is the country which the agency has its **registered address** in. Information on the formal status of the agency in the country's education system as well as on the formal impact of the agency's decisions, if any, should be obtained from the competent national authorities.

\*\* This is a list of countries provided by the agency for informational purposes. **It does not imply any official recognition of the agency's quality assurance results or decisions by the competent authorities in those countries, for whatever purpose.**

This is a specimen page to illustrate how entries on the register look. All information is entirely fictional. Should there be any similarities to (an) existing establishment(s), these are completely coincidental and unintentional. No prejudice on future (non-)inclusion of any agency shall be constituted.

## Annex IV. Mission Statement

**EQAR's mission is to further the development of the European Higher Education Area by increasing transparency of quality assurance, and thus enhancing trust and confidence in European higher education.**

EQAR seeks to provide clear reliable information on quality assurance provision in Europe, thus improving trust among agencies.

EQAR seeks to facilitate the mutual acceptance of quality assurance decisions and to improve trust among higher education institutions, thus promoting mobility and recognition.

EQAR seeks to reduce opportunities for "accreditation mills" to gain credibility in Europe, thus further enhancing the confidence of students, institutions, the labour market and society more generally in the quality of higher education provision in Europe.

**To achieve its mission EQAR manages a register of quality assurance agencies operating in Europe that substantially comply with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG).**

EQAR recognises the diversity of approaches to external quality assurance and is therefore open to all agencies, whether operating at programme or institutional level, whether providing accreditation, evaluation or audit services.

EQAR is committed to the principle on which the ESG are based: external quality assurance should recognise the central responsibility of higher education institutions for quality development and should be carried out by independent quality assurance agencies in a transparent, objective and responsible manner, involving their stakeholders and leading to substantiated results based on well-defined procedures and criteria.

EQAR acts independently from other organisations and is committed to taking proportionate, consistent, fair and objective decisions.

EQAR will make transparent its mode of operation and its procedures while ensuring necessary confidentiality. EQAR is committed to continuously improving the quality of its work.

*(adopted by the EQAR General Assembly on 25 June 2008 in Sarajevo)*