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ANNUAL 2016 REPORT 2016



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//// Foreword

Dear readers,

The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) are the foundation of EQAR's work. In 2016, the EQAR Register Committee considered the first eight external reviews of quality assurance agencies against the 2015 version of the ESG. Two agencies were newly admitted to the Register, and six had their registration renewed.

In its meeting of April 2016, the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) underlined that three key commitments underpin international trust and thereby the success of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), one being quality assurance in line with ESG.

By the end of 2016, the Register included 44 quality assurance agencies from 22 European countries. With some additional countries making use of evaluation, review or accreditation performed by suitable EQAR-registered agencies, approximately half of the EHEA signatory countries have successfully implemented a system of external quality assurance by agencies that demonstrably comply with the ESG, as required by the key commitment.

2016 was an important year for EQAR's organisational development. Launched in 2015, EQAR concluded its second self-evaluation with a Self-Evaluation Report published after adoption by the General Assembly, in April 2016. Based on a recommendation from the self-evaluation, EQAR prepared changes to clarify the position of President. The selection process was launched in late 2016 and the new President will take over from July 2017.

Responding to a second main recommendation, EQAR studied the feasibility of a database of external quality assurance results, based on surveys of potential users as well as registered agencies. The results, including an operational model, were presented and discussed with EQAR members in November 2016.

We wish to thank all members and partners for the excellent cooperation throughout the year. EQAR's membership includes the European stakeholder organisations and, by the end of 2016, 37 of the 48 EHEA countries. We also encourage the remaining EHEA countries to become members, to participate in the governance of EQAR, and thus to support the European quality assurance framework and a key commitment of the EHEA.

Ot Owner

Tia Loukkola President, Executive Board



Chair, Register Committee

/// Report of the Register Committee

This section of the Annual Report relates to the work of the EQAR Register Committee. The Register Committee independently considers and decides upon applications by quality assurance agencies for inclusion on the Register.

1.1 Transition to the ESG 2015

In line with the Policy on Transition to the Revised ESG (June 2015), the transition to the 2015 version of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) was completed. In 2016, the Register Committee considered the eight first applications based on the ESG 2015.*

1.2 Decisions on Inclusion and Renewal of Registration

The Register Committee newly admitted two agencies to the Register: the Aragon Agency for Quality Assurance and Strategic Foresight in Higher Education (ACPUA) and Music Quality Enhancement (MusiQuE). The Register Committee considered six applications for renewal of registration. Registration was renewed for four agencies, while two applications were deferred pending additional representation on the reasons for a possible rejection (see Table 1 and Annex 7 for details) until the Register Committee's next meeting in June 2017.

At the end of 2016, the Register included 44 quality assurance agencies from 22 European countries/territories (see Map 1).

Table 2 provides an overview of the level of compliance achieved for the different standards. Full details are available in the Register Committee's published decisions.

The full decisions are available at https://eqar.eu/publications/decisions.html

1.3 Monitoring of Registered Agencies

The Register Committee continued to increase its focus on monitoring registered agencies' work and compliance with the ESG between the periodic applications for renewal of registration.

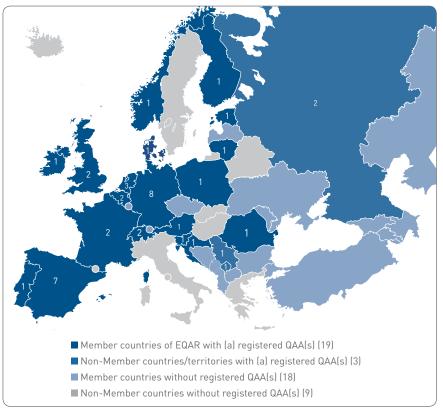
Substantive Change Reports

According to the Procedures for Applications, registered agencies are requested to inform EQAR of substantive changes. The Register Committee considered 14 substantive change reports in 2016.

Table 3 gives an overview of the type of changes reported. The Register Committee took note of all reports, but requested a further report in one case where it concluded that a change was not in compliance with the ESG.

Table 1: Overview Applications in 2016				
Α	Initial Applications	2		
В	Approved	2		
С	Withdrawn	0		
D	Rejected	0		
Е	Pending 2 nd consideration	0		
F	Renewal Applications (every 5 years)	6		
G	Approved	4		
Н	Withdrawn	0		
- 1	Rejected	0		
J	Pending 2 nd consideration	2		
K	Appeals	0		
L	Successful	0		
М	Unsuccessful	0		
N	Registration ended or expired	0		
(see http://www.eqar.eu/register/former-entries.html)				

^{*} A large number of registered agencies, however, had their registration provisionally extended until 31/12/2016 (according to the Policy) and are thus due for renewal in early 2017. EQAR therefore expects that the relatively small number of applications in 2016 will be followed by a peak in 2017.



All reports were published together with the Register Committee's decision on the report at https://eqar.eu/publications/ decisions.html as well as on the respective agency's register entry.

Annual Monitoring

In addition to reporting substantive changes as they occur, all registered agencies are asked to provide an annual update on the number of reviews carried out, broken down by country.

Especially in relation to reviews carried out by agencies across borders, EQAR encountered frequent questions and concerns regarding the publication of full accreditation/evaluation/audit reports. Also the RIQAA project identified the publication of reports as a problem area, noting that agencies tend to be less stringent in

Table 2: Level of Compliance by Standard in Applications (2016)						
ESG	Compliance	Partial c.	ESG	Compliance	Partial c.new	
2.1 Consideration of internal QA	6		3.1 Activities, policy and processes for QA	4	2	
2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose	6		3.2 Official status	6		
2.3 Implementing processes	4	2	3.3 Independence	6		
2.4 Peer-review experts	4	2	3.4 Thematic analysis	4	2	
2.5 Criteria for outcomes	5	1	3.5 Resources	4	2	
2.6 Reporting	5	1	3.6 Internal QA and professional conduct	5	1	
2.7 Complaints and appeals	3	3	3.7 Cyclical external review	6		

Table 3: Substantive Change Reports				
Type of change	Number of registered agencies			
Changes in the organisational identity	1			
Changes in the organisational structure	4			
New external quality assurance activities	7			
Changes in existing external quality assurance activities	8			
Discontinuation of existing activities	3			

the publication of reports for cross-border reviews than for national reviews.

Consequently, EQAR followed up the annual updates to verify whether corresponding reports were published and accessible on the agency's website.

Registered QA agencies that carried out cross-border external QA activities (see section 2.3 for more details) have improved the publication of reports and results over the years. While in 2014 and 2015 for about half of these agencies at least some of the reports of the cross-border QA activities could not be easily found on their website, the situation improved in 2016 with fewer cases where reports had not been published on the QA agency's website.

Agencies responded positively to the requests for clarification in those cases and took note of the need to publish the report for all external QA activities within the scope of the ESG, whether carried out within or outside the EHEA.

Complaints

EQAR did not receive any complaints about registered agencies in 2016.

In rare cases, individuals or organisations informally allured to concerns about the work of a registered agency in front of the EQAR Secretariat or individual Register Committee members. They were referred to the Complaints Policy and related web form, which also allows complaints to be made anonymously. Since no formal complaints were

received, the Register Committee presumed that there was no substance to concerns uttered informally.

1.4 Verification of Eligibility and Activities within the Scope of the ESG

In conjunction with the transition to the ESG 2015, the EQAR Procedures for Applications were revised in 2015 so that agencies have to apply for inclusion on the Register (or renewal of registration, respectively) before undergoing an external review against the ESG.

The eligibility of the application is verified immediately and the agency receives a confirmation which of its activities are within the scope of the ESG and should be reviewed. This allows EQAR to ensure that the external review of applicant agencies covers all relevant activities of the agency and thus constitutes a thorough basis for the Register Committee's consideration and decision-making.

By the end of 2016, EQAR had completed the eligibility verification for 26 applications. Based on the experience thus far, the Register Committee concluded that the prior analysis of agencies' activities reduced ambiguities to some extent as to which activities are within the scope of the ESG, improved the proper coverage of external review reports and thus the basis of the Register Committee's decisions.



EQAR Register Committee, hosted by Lyon University, December 2016

1.5 Recurring Issues

The Register Committee encountered some recurring issues in the applications:

Evaluation of Research

Several agencies carry out evaluation activities in the field of research. While it was clarified that evaluation of research as such is not within the scope of the ESG, the Register Committee noted that the ESG relate to teaching and learning, including "relevant links to research and innovation". It was thus clarified that external quality assurance activities addressing the link between teaching/learning and research/innovation may be within the scope of the ESG.

Activities outside the EHEA

Several agencies offer external quality assurance to higher education institutions outside the EHEA. The Register Committee underlined that it takes into account all activities within the scope of the ESG carried out within and outside the EHEA, as specified in the Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG.

The Register is based on the principle that agencies are registered as a whole and the requirement of ESG compliance thus extends to all their activities. EQAR's users expect that all reviews carried out by a registered agency are in compliance with the ESG and it would thus not be clear and transparent if some activities were not in compliance.

Obviously, non-EHEA HEIs are not obliged to undergo a review by an EQAR-registered

agency, possibly except for cases where they award an EHEA qualification (then it is logical that quality assurance are carried out in line with the ESG). Most examples suggest that non-EHEA institutions seeking accreditation or evaluation by an EQAR-registered agency do so specifically in order to acquire a European label.

Separation between External Quality Assurance and Other Activities

Several agencies offer consultancy or similar services to higher education institutions in addition to their external quality assurance activities. In relation to ESG 3.1, the Register Committee underlined the need to demonstrate a clear separation between external quality assurance and such other activities, which needs to be addressed in the external review of agencies.

Following a substantial number of questions received and uncertainty expressed by registered agencies, the Register Committee began deliberations on a Policy on External Quality Assurance and Other Activities, considering the various types of activities beyond the scope of the ESG that registered agencies might carry out, and how those are expected to be separated from the agencies' external quality assurance work.

A draft Policy will be circulated to EQAR members and registered agencies in 2017 for consultation.



EQAR General Assembly in Amsterdam, hosted by the Dutch EU Presidency, March 2016

1.6 Improved Communication with Review Coordinators

In order to ensure that the external review reports received by the Register Committee meet the Committee's requirements and expectations, EQAR continued the close cooperation with the two major coordinators of external reviews, ENQA and the German Accreditation Council (GAC).

EQAR participated in the regular ENQA Training of Reviewers, the 2^{nd} ENQA Reviewers' Seminar and the GAC Training of

Register Committee meeting, hosted by the Lisbon School of Nursing (ESEL)

Experts. These provided an opportunity to explain the Register Committee's expectations from external review reports and to clarify questions around EQAR's use of review reports and the Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG. As a result, the way in which their reports are used by the EQAR Register Committee has become clearer for the experts involved in agency reviews.



EQAR Register Committee meeting in Lisbon, June 2016

//// Contribution to Policy Developments in the EHEA

2.1 Bologna Follow-Up Group and Working Groups

In preparation of the EHEA Ministerial Conference 2018 in Paris, EQAR has been contributing to the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) and some of its working groups and advisory groups.

EQAR is a member of the working groups on Monitoring (WG 1) and Implementation of agreed reform (WG 2), and the advisory group on Non-Implementation (AG3). By participating in these groups, EQAR has supported the key commitments made by EHEA ministers related to quality assurance (e.g. application of the ESG, implementation of the European Approach, opening national systems to ESG-compliant quality assurance agencies, recognition of qualifications).

EQAR and ENQA jointly prepared a session of BFUG WG2 on "Internationalisation of (External) Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area", which covered external quality assurance across borders, quality assurance of joint programmes and quality assurance of cross-border higher education.

More at www.eqar.eu/2016

- >> BFUG work programme 2015-2018
- >> Background paper: internationalisation of quality assurance [WG2 meeting, November 2016]

2.2 Enhancing Quality through Innovative Policy & Practice (EQUIP)

As part of a consortium led by EURASHE and including ENQA, EUA, ESU, EI, University of Oslo and Portuguese Polytechnics Coordinating Council, EQAR has been supporting the implementation, dissemination and promotion of ESG 2015 through the EQUIP project (Enhancing Quality through Innovative Policy & Practice).

EQUIP is co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme (between November 2015 and January 2018) and aims to enhance quality in European higher education by supporting and promoting a consistent, efficient and innovative embedding of the ESG at grass-root level.

Within the framework of the EQUIP project, two webinars and three workshops were organised in 2016. EQAR contributed as speaker or panel member to some of those, addressing the changes in external quality assurance as a result of the ESG 2015.

To further consolidate the evidence collected about the implementation challenges of the ESG 2015 as well as to share good practice, a number of focus groups are to be carried out in 2017. A study will be produced examining the impact of the ESG revision.

More at www.egar.eu/2016

>> See also: www.equip-project.eu

2.3 Registered Agencies' External Quality Assurance Activities

EQAR carried out its third annual monitoring of the registered agencies' external QA activities (evaluation, accreditation, audit) in 2016.

The currently 44 registered QA agencies conducted a total of 9 764 external QA activities at institutional (6%), programme (93%) or joint programme level (0.3%). These reviews were spread across 30 EHEA and 20 non-EHEA countries or territories.

Compared to the external QA activities carried out in 2015, there was a 1,7% increase, and a 6,5% increase compared to 2014. While two more agencies were registered in 2016 compared to 2015, the increase of external QA activities has not been the consequence of the activities of the newly added agencies, but the result of the increased number of external QA procedures

carried out by a few QA agencies. Eight of the registered agencies (AAC-DEVA, CTI, BAC, EAPAA, ACQUIN, fmid, evalag, ZeVA) increased their total number of reviews by 50% or more compared to 2015.

The intensity of external QA activities varied also according to the type of external QA carried out. National or regional QA agencies that focus on programme-level accreditations or evaluations carried out the highest amount of external QA procedures in general. For instance, 50% of the external quality assurance activities in 2016 were carried out by only 7 of the 44 registered QA agencies: HCERES, A3ES, fmid, AQU Catalunya, ACQUIN, ARACIS and CAQA.

Examining the external QA activities over the past three years, the following trends were observed:

/ QA agencies have increased their programme level external QA activities by 9% compared to 2014, and by 3% compared to 2015.

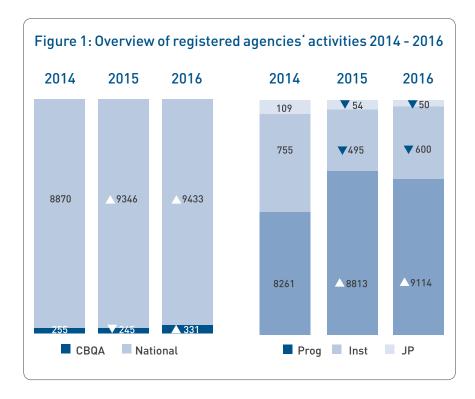
/ The external quality assurance of joint programmes registered a significant decrease in the past years, by 54% compared to 2014 and by 21% compared to 2015.

/ The cross-border EQA activities registered an increase of 29% in their total number compared to 2014 and a 35% increase compared to 2015.

Cross-border external QA activities were carried out by 21 of the EQAR registered QA agencies in 2016, showing a similar trend as in previous years. The 21 QA agencies reviewed a total of 304 programmes (including joint programmes) and 27 higher education institutions from 18 EHEA and 20 non-EHEA countries/territories. More than half of the cross-border external QA activities in 2016 were carried out by ACQUIN and CTI (see figure). Home country reviews remain, as in previous years, the primary focus of national or regional QA agencies. On average, 6% of their external QA activities were across borders, while 94% were in their home country.

Joint programme reviews were carried out by 12 QA agencies, of which 6 stated that they used the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (see below).

The full overview of registered agencies' activities by agency and country can be found in Annex 6.



2.4 Cross-Border Quality Assurance

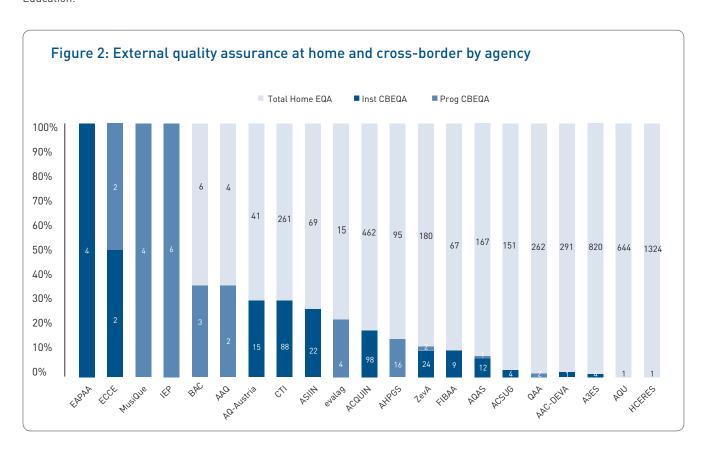
Legal frameworks

EQAR continued to monitor developments in European countries' legal frameworks with regard to the recognition of EQAR-registered quality assurance agencies and their results/decisions. Map 2 shows the situation by the end of 2016, following some changes during the year.

In Cyprus, legal changes entered into effect that allow all higher education institutions to choose a suitable EQAR-registered quality assurance agency for their subsequent programme or institutional evaluation, after an initial evaluation by the national Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education

New legal provisions also came into force in Luxembourg in September 2016, providing that the accreditation of private and foreign higher education institutions (i.e. transnational higher education provision) is carried out by a suitable EQAR-registered agency, selected by the Ministry, following the accreditation criteria set out in a national regulation. The public University of Luxembourg has 'self-accrediting power' and is not subject to the regulation.

In Germany, a new legal framework became necessary after a ruling of the Federal Constitutional Court. According to the new framework under development, all accreditation decisions will be taken by the Accreditation Council (GAC) in the future, on the



basis of a report produced by a suitable EQAR-registered agency.

In 2016, EQAR updated the presentation of national legal frameworks on the EQAR website. The information, presented for all countries in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), now follows a standardised template, so as to make the information more comparable between countries.

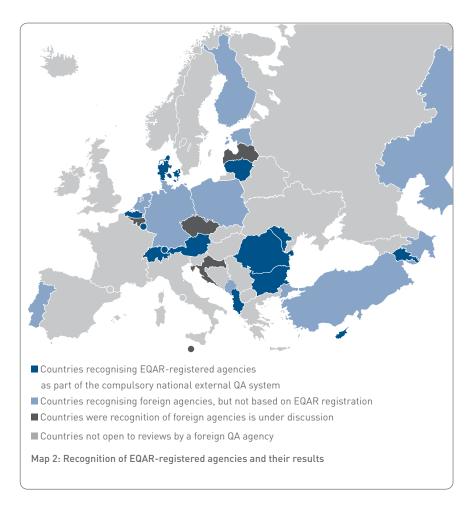
More at www.egar.eu/2016

>> Interactive map with information on national legal frameworks

E4/EQAR Ad-Hoc Group on Key Considerations

Following the results of the RIQAA project project (Recognising International Quality Assurance Activities), EQAR and the E4 organisations set up a joint adhoc group to discuss key issues that should be taken into consideration when planning cross-border QA activities.

The ad-hoc group drafted a document summarising a number of key considerations for cross-border external QA. These were presented and discussed within the E4 organisations, at the workshop organised as part of the BFUG Implementation Working Group meeting in Nice, at the European Quality Assurance Forum in Ljubljana (17-19 November 2016) and at the EQAR Members' Dialogue in Oslo (24-25 November 2016).



The key considerations reaffirm that the ESG are the basis for all QA in the EHEA, They are non-biding in character and are set out to support and inspire higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies that engage in, or consider engaging in, cross-border QA activities.

In addition, the key considerations might serve as a useful tool also for governments when reviewing their legal frameworks with a view to allowing their institutions to make use of a suitable EQAR-registered agency in fulfilling their external QA requirements.

More at www.eqar.eu/2016

>> Key considerations for Cross-border Quality Assurance

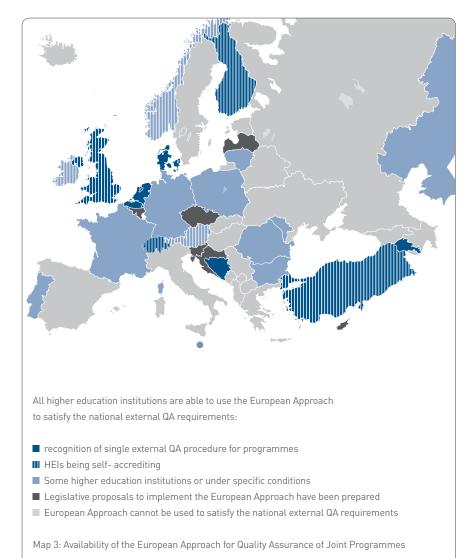
2.5 European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes

Since the adoption by ministers of the European Approach in May 2015, EQAR, as one of the organisations involved in its development, has followed up the implementation of the European Approach.

Two countries made specific decisions to recognise its use (e.g. Germany, Netherlands), whereas in some other EHEA countries some or all higher education institutions are subject to obligatory external quality assurance at institutional level only (i.e. they are "self-accrediting" their programmes) and may thus choose to use the European Approach in their internal QA arrangements at their own discretion.

Even though discussions are ongoing and legislative changes are being drafted (e.g. in Croatia and Slovenia), no progress in terms of changes to legal frameworks could be encountered in 2016.

In early 2016, the ITEPS programme (International Teacher Education for Primary Schools, offered by Stenden University of Applied Sciences, the Netherlands, and University College of Southeast Norway) became the first programme to be accredited based on the European Approach, by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO).



Even though several EQAR-registered agencies reported having used the European Approach in accreditations or evaluations of joint programmes in 2016, in most cases they did not use the agreed standards and procedure directly; rather, agencies considered that there own standards and procedure were compatible with the European Approach.

//// Communication



© IAAR - "Global Challenges and Future of the Independent Accreditation in Kazakhstan" in Astana

3.1 Publications

The EQAR Annual Report 2015, including the Report by the Register Committee, was published in April 2016 at the same time as the EQAR Self-Evaluation Report.

Both reports, together with a Comparative Analysis of the ESG 2015 and ESG 2005, which was prepared as part of the EQUIP project (Enhancing Quality through Innovative Policy and Practice), were mailed to all members of EQAR, national affiliates of EQAR's stakeholder members and other partner organisations.

3.2 Newsletter

In 2016, EQAR issued two newsletters, reaching more than 700 recipients each. Topics included information about new agencies on the Register, relevant policy developments with regard to quality assurance and the use of EQAR in the national quality assurance frameworks of EHEA countries.

3.3 Website and Social Media

EQAR's website remains the principal communication tool, with the most viewed pages being the list and map of the registered quality assurance agencies. The website further features regularly updated news items, general information on EQAR and its workings, guidance for applicant quality assurance agencies and other publications.

Apart from the website, EQAR maintained an active presence on social media, including Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. EQAR reached out to up to 500 people via its Facebook page and had approximately 700 followers on Twitter by the end of 2016.

3.4 Representation and Relations with Partners

EQAR was represented in major conferences and seminars concerned with quality assurance of higher education in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

In addition to events co-organised by EQAR itself (e.g. EQUIP project) and BFUG working structure meetings, this included 24 regional, European or international and 10 national events, with an active contribution as presenter in 75% of them.

Furthermore, EQAR had 13 bilateral meetings with members, quality assurance agencies or scholars in the field of higher education policy, either as delegation visits to the EQAR office or visits of EQAR representatives to the organisation.

//// Organisational Development

4.1 Self-Evaluation and Follow-Up

The EQAR self-evaluation process, launched in 2015, was concluded in early 2016 with the adoption by the General Assembly of the EQAR Self-Evaluation Report, which was published on-line and as a printed publication. During 2016, the main recommendations made in the Report were followed up.

One key recommendation was to clarify the position of President in EQAR, in order to raise the external visibility and to enhance stability and leadership internally. The Executive Board prepared a proposal to change the organisational structure of EQAR, including the necessary statutory amendments. The proposal was adopted by an extraordinary General Assembly organised as part of the Members' Dialogue 2016.

Considerations around a possible database of evaluated and accredited higher education institutions and programmes have been part of EQAR's Strategic Plan since 2013. This was taken further in the self-evaluation, resulting in a recommendation to study the feasibility in detail and to prepare an operational model.

In the course of 2016, EQAR surveyed the 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.

The results fed into a report and operational model for a database of external quality assurance results, presented at the EQAR Members' Dialogue 2016.

More at www.egar.eu/2016

- >> Self-Evaluation Report (April 2016)
- >> Database of External Quality Assurance Results: Report and Operational Model
- >> EQAR Members' Dialogue 2016: Presentations

>> EQAR Members' Dialogue 2016: Summary of discussions re. database of external QA reports

4.2 Membership

At the end of 2016, 37 of the 48 EHEA countries that are eligible to apply for governmental membership were members of EQAR.

4.3 Statutory Bodies

The Executive Board had four meetings in 2016, the Register Committee convened for two physical meetings and dealt with a number of issues via email. There was no meeting of the Appeals Committee, since no appeals were made in 2016.

Johan Cloet (EURASHE) resigned from the Executive Board following the end of his mandate as EURASHE Secretary General. The General Assembly of 25 November 2016 by-elected Michal Karpíšek, EURASHE Secretary General, to replace him on the Board. The full composition of all EQAR statutory bodies is included in Annex 5.

4.4 Staff

There were no changes in the staff of the Secretariat in 2016, keeping the total at 2,6 full-time equivalent (FTE).

4.5 Finances

EQAR relies on a diversified funding base including annual contributions from its members (governments and European stakeholder organisations), application and listing fees paid by quality assurance agencies, and occasional project grants. In 2016, EQAR received a grant of EUR 11 812 as partner in the EQUIP project (Enhancing Quality through innovative Policy & Practice, 2015 – 2018).

The financial year 2016 resulted in a surplus of EUR 2 428,50.

Table 4: Balance Sheet					
Assets		Liabilities and Equity			
Fixed assets	898,26	Own funds	144 022,18		
Guarantees	147,66	Profit/loss previous years	31 593,68		
Office equipment	750,60	Result per 31/12/2015	2 428,50		
Liquid assets	174 229,69	Reserves	110 000,00		
Receivables up to 1 year	27 396,25	Liabilities	31 105,77		
Cash and term accounts	131 092,90	Payables up to 1 year	25 945,77		
Adjustment accounts	15 740,54	Adjustment accounts	5 160,00		
TOTAL	175 127,95	TOTAL	175 127,95		

Table 5: Profit and Loss Account					
Income		Expenditure			
Membership fees	250 950,00	Meetings and projects	70 815,76		
Agency fees	53 148,00	Office and administration	43 209,70		
Project grant	11 811,87	Staff	166 778,00		
Other income	4 979,15	Other costs	25 263,26		
Operational income	320 889,02	Operational expenditure	306 066,72		
Operational result	14 822,30				
Financial income	166,87	Financial costs and taxes	60,67		
Total result	4 928,50				
Withdrawal from reserves	0,00	Allocation to reserves	12 500,00		
Result to be reported	2 428,50				