

Strategic Priorities and Follow-Up of the External Evaluation of EQAR

General Assembly
17 January 2011

February 2012

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The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) welcomes the Report of the Expert Panel Appointed to Review EQAR and thanks the Panel for its valuable reflections and suggestions.

EQAR also thanks the Steering Group working under the auspices of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) for coordinating this evaluation.

I. Developing the Role of EQAR

EQAR concurs with the Panel's general recommendation that EQAR should develop further from its focus on establishing robust procedures, during its initial developmental phase, towards developing, implementing and realising a strategy, with a view to realising the goals and objectives for EQAR defined at the outset.

In doing so, EQAR is guided by the following principles:

- EQAR's role is determined by and based on its mission, objectives and unique membership structure, including both stakeholder organisations and governments.
- EQAR's role as a register of quality assurance agencies is unique and not intended to duplicate other organisations' mission or activities. With its specific objectives the Register contributes to the wider goals of improving the quality of higher education, trust and recognition based on internationally recognised, transparent and robust quality assurance procedures within the European Higher Education Area

(EHEA).

- EQAR's activities relate to its role as a register and the objectives agreed at the outset, rather than turning into a generic policy-making organisation dealing with a broad range of education-related issues. EQAR's unique broad ownership by stakeholders and governments is based on its role as a register and the objectives related to that.
- EQAR's "regulatory role" and "strategic role" are thus not separate, but two sides of the same coin, both of them being assumed under the same mission and objectives.

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EQAR needs the active support and commitment of its members and particularly of EHEA governments in order to be able to further develop and realise its mission and international role.

II. EQAR and the European External Quality Assurance Landscape

During the first years of its existence EQAR has established its position as a reliable register of quality assurance agencies operating in Europe in substantial compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). The Panel noted that the "*number of agencies now on the Register is testament both to the amount of work undertaken [...] and to the reputation that [EQAR] has established as a credible and valuable organisation.*"

The survey of quality assurance agencies conducted as part of the EQAR self-evaluation process showed that the most relevant rationale for agencies to be on the Register is to improve international reputation. The second most prominent reason is to improve recognition of qualifications or institutions that agencies have evaluated, accredited or audited.

The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is constructed on the basis of common European principles and on the growing internationalisation of higher education. In developing and pursuing their own profiles and missions higher education institutions welcome the opportunity for evaluation, accreditation or audit incorporating their diverse activities and with an international added value.

In recent years, there has been a growth in international quality assurance activities, cross-border reviews and European external quality assurance-related initiatives, both of a generic nature or discipline-specific. One example is the growing number of quality labels. Another is that some national quality assurance agencies are operating internationally and offering reviews to institutions from other countries.

Since 2005 the ESG have codified the principles of a common European approach to quality assurance. More recently the establishment of EQAR has created the necessary preconditions for international recognition by serving as authoritative European reference point for quality assurance agencies working in substantial compliance with the ESG.

EQAR is open to national and non-national agencies alike, from Europe as well as from other parts of the world. All agencies that have had their compliance with the ESG reviewed can apply for inclusion on the Register and will be judged according to the standards and guidelines set out in the ESG.

Whether or not quality assurance decisions and results are recognised within a certain national jurisdiction depends on the commitment of governments and other actors to the European QA infrastructure as well as the principle of recognition of registered agencies.

As of January 2012, in seven European countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Lithuania, Poland and Romania) EQAR-registered quality assurance agencies enjoy official recognition of one sort or another. This reflects trust in the Register and considerable progress in the short period since EQAR was established, bearing in mind that legislative processes often take substantial time.

These examples represent a trend towards widespread international recognition of registered agencies or their decisions, which might be more direct and adapted to the principles of the EHEA than recognition of quality assurance agencies or decisions based on numerous bilateral agreements or complex multilateral agreements. The key prerequisite for this trend is trust, both in EQAR itself as well as in evaluation, audit and accreditation by EQAR-registered agencies being robust and meaningful. The ESG constitute the basis for such trust, and this need for trust will be one important principle for the future development of the ESG.

EQAR is a key actor using the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). In turn, the ESG are the fundament for EQAR's work. The Register Committee has acquired considerable experience in using the ESG as criteria for the Register, a purpose distinctly different from that of any other users of the ESG. First reflections on the basis of this experience were set out in the EQAR Input to the MAP-ESG Project of August 2011.

III. Response to the Panel's Specific Recommendations

In the following, EQAR responds to the External Evaluation Panel's specific recommendations (see section 8, pages 7 – 13, and appendix 6) and sets out its planned actions or further considerations.

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i. The General Assembly should add strategic planning to its current list of functions. [Para 8.5].

The panel made this recommendation in the light of its general comment as to the need to enhance the strategic focus of EQAR. It also specified that “day-to-day responsibility for this activity should be delegated to the Executive Board”.

Response: EQAR agrees with the recommendation. It considers that the General Assembly (GA) should have responsibility for adopting strategic goals and priorities, thus exercising strategic planning at the highest level. The Executive Board should be responsible for implementing and operationalising the decisions of the GA. Thus, the Executive Board should be in charge of strategic management on a day-to-day basis, in consultation with the Register Committee and supported by the Secretariat. The Executive Board should propose amendments to the EQAR Statutes in order to reflect these responsibilities, if necessary.

EQAR further considers that there is a need for an ongoing discussion on strategic goals and priorities within all EQAR statutory bodies, taking account of their specific roles and feeding into a strategic plan presented to the GA. A second “Members’ Dialogue” for EQAR members and committees will serve as an opportunity to discuss EQAR’s strategy and form the basis for preparing a strategic plan. The future strategic plan should serve as a reference point for the work of all bodies.

Proposal:

- a. develop a strategic plan, coordinated by the Executive Board
- b. investigate the need for statutory changes

Indicative timing:

- a. Members’ Dialogue in the autumn of 2012, final consideration at the GA in 2013
- b. until the GA in 2013

ii. EQAR should promote with the organisations nominating representatives to the General Assembly the benefits to EQAR of ensuring, as far as possible, that those representing them remain on the Assembly for three years renewable for a further three years [Para 8.6].

Response: EQAR agrees that members should be encouraged to ensure continuity of their General Assembly representatives as much as possible.

Since they serve as representatives of governments or stakeholder

organisations, rather than in their personal capacity, it is in the members' autonomy to decide on their General Assembly (GA) representative(s) as they see fit, and there cannot be a fixed length of mandate or rules for how long an individual might represent a member.

Proposal: no formal changes, but discussion within the GA

iii. Members of the Executive Board should serve an initial mandate of at least three years (currently two years) renewable for up to two times (currently three times) [Para 8.7]

iv. Members of the Register Committee should serve an initial mandate of at least three years (currently two years) renewable for up to two times (currently three times) [Para 8.8]

Response: EQAR agrees that longer mandates of the Executive Board and Register Committee could be helpful in improving continuity.

When EQAR was established its founders (informally) agreed that committee members should ideally serve for at least four years and that the two nominees of one organisation should normally not be change at the same time. Committee members can serve for up to eight years in total.

The two-year mandates were put in place being mindful of the fact that not all organisations can nominate individuals for a term of four years. It was agreed to avoid different arrangements for different organisations.

Therefore, EQAR will communicate more clearly to the nominating organisations that it would be beneficial if new committee members served for at least four years (two mandates). EQAR will not change the official lengths of mandates for the time being.

Proposal: no formal changes for the time being

Criteria for the Register

v. EQAR should clarify its current criteria for establishing prima facie organisational eligibility to apply for registration [Para 8.12]

In conjunction with this recommendation the panel also noted that “*where an applicant failed to meet what might be regarded as ‘technical’ criteria, for example, by submitting an evaluation report produced by a review panel that did not include a student member, the introduction of some form of pre-application scrutiny or advice could result in an application being deferred rather than proceeding to application and inevitable rejection*” [Para 8.11]. It was pointed out that the recommendation is intended to “*avoid unnecessary expenditure of time and reduce confusion and misunderstanding*” [Para 8.12].

Response: EQAR agrees with the recommendation. The Register Committee will consider this matter within a review of the Procedures for Applications. This should introduce a clear specification of organisational eligibility for

inclusion on the Register, requirements for external reviews and a procedure to verify eligibility before an external review of the potential applicant and the application process proper.

Proposal: revision of Procedures for Applications by the Register Committee in consultation with the GA

Indicative timing: draft revised Procedures for Applications by mid-2012

- vi EQAR should enhance the transparency of its decision-making by:*
- *making public the names of each applicant which satisfies organisational eligibility criteria; and*
 - *making public the Register Committee's decision on each application*

[Para 8.14]

The panel confirmed EQAR's self-analysis that its policy of confidentiality, though initially justified, has now more negative than positive consequences. The panel pointed out "*that the procedures now in place are sufficiently robust and the credibility of EQAR sufficiently well established for its initial concern for confidentiality no longer to be justified*" [idem].

Response: EQAR agrees with the Panel's recommendation, which follows up the corresponding issue identified in the self-evaluation report.

This recommendation will also need to be implemented within a revision of the Procedures for Applications (see above), on which the current policy of confidentiality is based. This revision will clarify the form and level of detail for decisions made public.

At the Members' Dialogue in the autumn of 2012 (see i.) members will be invited to discuss the draft revised Procedures for Applications.

Proposal: revision of Procedures for Applications by the Register Committee in consultation with the GA (at Members' Dialogue)

Indicative timing: draft revised Procedures for Applications by mid-2012, discussion at the Members' Dialogue (autumn)

- vii. Observers should no longer be appointed to the Register Committee*
[Para 8.15]

The panel made reference to the Register Committee's accountability to the General Assembly as well as the appeals system. The panel pointed out that, in its view, "*observers may have made sense when the registration process was being established and tested*", but that "*if the recommendations in paragraph 8.14, supporting greater transparency in its procedures, and in paragraph 8.31 clarifying EQAR's relationship with ENQA, [were] accepted and implemented*" observers were no longer necessary.

Response: Within the Register Committee as well as in the Members'

Dialogue discussions there was broad agreement that the observers have served to strengthen accountability to governments and to increase trust in the Register Committee's procedures. EQAR therefore considers that the five governmental observers should remain on the Register Committee for the time being.

There was some discussion around the fact that currently the BFUG elects observers rather than the EQAR General Assembly. When these arrangements were agreed the role and composition of the GA were not yet defined. It, however, now appears unusual that governments can be observers while not being Governmental Member. Governments with an interest in EQAR's workings should be expected to become Governmental Members. Moreover, the governmental observers should strengthen accountability of the Register Committee's work first and foremost towards the fellow governmental and other members of EQAR.

Therefore, observers should be chosen from amongst the Governmental Members of EQAR by the EQAR General Assembly in the future.

EQAR will continue and enhance its regular communication to the BFUG. At the same time, Governmental Members should benefit from more detailed reporting.

The principle question whether or not there is a need for governmental observers should be reconsidered within the next EQAR self evaluation, once the measures for enhancing transparency of decision-making (recommendations v. and vi.) have been implemented.

Proposal: a. change of nomination procedure by the GA, based on Executive Board proposal
 b. review principle question at a later point in time

Indicative timing: a. as of the 2014/16 Register Committee mandate
 b. within next EQAR self-evaluation

viii. Each element of EQAR [see para 7.3] should evaluate formally its effectiveness on a regular basis [Para 8.16]

Response: EQAR agrees with this recommendation. Such a regular formal evaluation should take place by the different bodies/committees in a coordinated manner and feed into a regular self-evaluation process of EQAR as a whole and the establishment of an internal QA system of EQAR itself. In particular, EQAR's strategic plan should be reviewed on the basis of each self-evaluation.

Proposal: regular self-evaluation of EQAR coordinated by the Executive Board and a Self-Evaluation Group

Indicative timing: next self-evaluation report presented to the 2016 GA and leading to a review of strategic plan in 2017

ix. Consideration should be given to finding a way to give academics as a

collectivity a voice in EQAR, which would help to embed quality assurance and the Register more firmly in institutions [Para 8.27]

The panel noted the “*remoteness of EQAR and its activities from the lecture room or laboratory*” and questioned “*whether the views of academic staff are appropriately or adequately represented in EQAR’s deliberations*”. The panel further raised the question whether “*the student learning experience*” was “*adequately reflected in the registration process*”.

Response: EQAR acknowledges (a) the need to demonstrate a clear link between its own work and (a better) “student learning experience”, i.e. the actual teaching and learning processes on the ground. EQAR, however, considers this separate from (b) the specific question of representation of academic staff in EQAR’s deliberations.

a) EQAR works within the framework of its agreed mission, objectives and functions. Thus, the link between EQAR’s work and the “student learning experience” is indirect and limited.

EQAR’s direct influence extends to scrutinising the work of quality assurance agencies. This is done based upon the findings of an independent external review of an agency which is currently not conducted by EQAR itself. Quality assurance agencies, in turn, influence teaching and learning, sometimes directly (e.g. in the case of programme-level QA) or more indirectly (e.g. via institutional quality assurance mechanisms in the case of institutional audits). The quality of the teaching and learning process is the central competence and responsibility of each higher education institution and its internal QA system.

Operating at meta-level, EQAR’s responsibility is to ensure that procedures and criteria for inclusion on the Register are relevant for and seek to improve the “student learning experience”. An increase in cross-border QA so that institutions can choose an agency to work with will have an influence on teaching and learning processes. By promoting internationally recognised, transparent and robust QA procedures EQAR also contributes to promoting a quality culture shared by all stakeholders in the EHEA.

Within the next self-evaluation EQAR will analyse further the “chain” from its criteria and procedures all the way down to the teaching and learning process on the ground. At the same time, this “chain” is an important aspect in relation to the revision of the ESG.

b) In terms of the representation of the views of academics in EQAR bodies it should be noted that in addition to EUA and EURASHE, who were mentioned by the panel, Education International, an organisation representing, inter alia, academic staff, is a member of EQAR and nominates one member to the Register Committee. Experience has also shown that 50% of all Committee members nominated thus far are active academic staff.

EQAR will review within its next self evaluation whether the voice of

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academics is appropriately reflected in EQAR's current arrangements, both formally as well as effectively, and consider improvements if necessary.

Proposal:

- a. focus the communication strategy (part of the future strategic plan) on making clear EQAR's indirect link to and impact on teaching and learning on the ground, determined by its mission and procedures, as well as the ESG
- b. analyse further the indirect link and impact, and how well they have been communicated
- c. review the formal as well as effective voice of academics in EQAR

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Indicative timing:

- a. strategic plan until 2013 (see i.), but also continuously as a general principle, particular attention in contributing to ESG revision
- b/c. next EQAR self-evaluation

EQAR and ENQA

x. *EQAR should engage in dialogue with ENQA on a range of matters with a view to clarifying and making public:*

- *the differences in function and purpose of the two organisations;*
- *their respective interpretations of the phrase '... substantial compliance ...' with the ESGs; and*
- *their respective criteria for establishing organisational eligibility for registration and membership respectively [Para 8.31]*

The panel primarily saw need for clarification arising from “*the use of the ESGs by both organisations, but for fundamentally different purposes; the awkwardness of the requirement to demonstrate ‘substantial compliance’ with the ESGs; the potential for different interpretations of this phrase by the two organisations; and the difficulty on the part of some ENQA members that have chosen not to apply for EQAR registration to see what value is added by being on the Register.*”

Response: EQAR is glad to intensify its continuous dialogue with ENQA. In addition, it will be important for EQAR in its own communication to present clearly its function, purpose and resulting criteria and procedures, in its own right, thus, on making its mission and *raison d'être* as clear and explicit as possible.

- a. EQAR and ENQA share a mutual understanding of their respective function and purpose. Thus, there is primarily a need to promote this common understanding. EQAR considers this as a transversal principle for its communication and will invite ENQA to discuss aligning each other's communication better.
- b. Given that ENQA and EQAR both use the ESG, but, as the panel noted, “for fundamentally different purposes”, it is possible that the two

organisations might conclude differently on what is “substantial compliance” with the ESG.

EQAR will continue to make public its understanding of substantial compliance within the regular reports by the Register Committee and consider to what extent it would be helpful to define “substantial compliance” further in EQAR’s Procedures for Applications. This will naturally also be linked to and depend on the future development of the ESG.

EQAR will invite ENQA to discuss each other’s use and interpretation of the ESG, for their respective purposes, and how to best communicate differences where they exist.

- c. EQAR will clarify its requirements for organisational eligibility as part of a revision of the Procedures for Applications (see recommendation v.) in the context of its own mission and function.

EQAR will invite ENQA to discuss each other’s requirements for organisational eligibility and the reasons for possible differences.

Proposal: a/b/c. invite ENQA to discuss the specific issues mentioned
 a. all parts of EQAR to communicate clearly the functions and purposes
 b/c. Register Committee to consider the points raised in its future reports and the revision of the Procedures for Applications

Indicative timing: a/b/c – during the first half of 2012
 a – continuous
 b/c – next Register Committee report in March 2012, draft revised Procedures by mid-2012

Profile

xi. EQAR should be more pro-active in promoting its existence and the benefits of being on the Register. This could include encouraging the E4 Group to be more proactive in promoting the existence of EQAR and the benefits of registration [Para 8.34].

Response: EQAR agrees with the recommendation and will focus its activities further on promoting its work and encouraging the E4 organisations to do similarly; monitoring, analysing and promoting how the Register is used at different levels; and informing eligible organisations about the possibility to seek inclusion on the Register.

EQAR notes that in addition to the E4 Group also BUSINESSEUROPE, Education International and the Governmental Members of EQAR have committed to supporting the objectives of EQAR and should thus be actively involved in promotional efforts.

EQAR will set out specific measures in its annual Plans of Work as well as a

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future strategic plan (see recommendation i.).

Proposal: a. measures to be set out in the Plan of Work based on the strategic priorities
b. measures to be incorporated in strategic plan

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Indicative timing: a. Plan of Work 2012 presented to March GA
b. presented to the GA in 2013

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xii The General Assembly should appoint a high profile, independent President capable of raising the visibility and promoting the benefits of EQAR with key stakeholders. Such an appointment should be for a period of up to four years in the first instance [Para 8.35].

Response: EQAR welcomes the principle to reflect the need for visibility and promotion of EQAR in its organisational structure.

Establishing such a position would be a major organisational change. It would require clarifying the internal role and responsibilities, as well as a more elaborate profile. An external representative function without being clearly involved in and linked to the organisational structure is not considered beneficial. If a President were introduced s/he should preside over both the GA and the Executive Board, thus replacing the current rotating presidency by the E4 Group.

The establishment of such a position would thus impact on the functioning and management of the GA, the Executive Board as well as the Register Committee. The implementation of this recommendation should therefore be considered further with a view to how to make such a position most beneficial both for external visibility as well as for the functioning of the different bodies of EQAR.

Meanwhile, EQAR seeks to strengthen its existing organisational structure (Executive Board, Register Committee, Secretariat) in carrying out their roles and increasing the visibility of EQAR.

Proposal: consider the recommendation further in the context of improving the visibility and functioning of EQAR

Indicative timing: proposals within the next EQAR self evaluation

IV. Strategic Priorities for EQAR

EQAR members propose as a general vision for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) that all external quality assurance procedures carried out by EQAR-registered agencies are trusted and internationally recognised across the different EHEA states.

EQAR members agree on two strategic priorities, which should be the starting point for developing a strategic plan and which should guide EQAR's future activities during the coming years.

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Priority 1: International trust and recognition

Objective: Promoting, through the Register, international trust and recognition of registered quality assurance agencies, their results and decisions throughout the EHEA

There are various dimensions to recognition and this priority includes encouraging governments and competent authorities to:

- recognise qualifications and higher education institutions evaluated, accredited or audited by registered agencies, including:
 - recognise quality assurance decisions and results regarding transnational education provision;
 - recognise quality assurance decisions and results on joint programmes;
- allow higher education institutions to work with all registered agencies, taking into account the respective national requirements.

Specific aims:

- promote the advantages of recognition of registered quality assurance agencies for institutions, governments, agencies, students and academics, using the existing examples of countries officially recognising registered agencies;
- engage in the revision of the ESG with a view to ensuring that they are a good basis for EQAR's work;
- analyse in greater detail the existing examples, ongoing debates and different views on agency recognition questions. *

Priority 2: Transparency and Information

Objective: Increasing transparency of EQAR's work and ensuring that information provided by EQAR is meaningful to its users

As a basis for the recognition of EQAR-registered agencies, trust and confidence in EQAR's procedures and decisions are of the utmost importance, primarily by governments and quality assurance agencies, but also by the wider higher education community.

Thus, it is crucial that EQAR makes transparent its procedures and decision-making, opening it to broad scrutiny and demonstrating that EQAR operates in a professional and credible manner.

In order to ensure that EQAR is meaningful to the higher education community it is central that EQAR provides valuable and useful information about the registered agencies and their work.

Specific aims:

- demonstrate EQAR's accountability to governments, stakeholders and the public;
- enhance transparency of eligibility requirements, criteria and decision-making, including publication of decisions;
- increase trust in EQAR's effective scrutiny of applicants and registered agencies;
- ensure that EQAR publishes meaningful information about quality assurance systems, the registered agencies and their work for its different users. *

EQAR members note that those specific aims marked with * require considerable additional resources; activities contributing to these aims could not be implemented within EQAR's current, limited financial and human resources.

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V. Conclusion

Strategic Priorities

EQAR agrees with the Panel's overarching recommendation to strengthen the strategic role of EQAR with a view to realising the wider goals and objectives for the Register defined in the ministerial mandate and the EQAR Mission Statement. EQAR will thus develop a strategic plan within the next year.

EQAR was established to further the development of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and, along with other organisations, to contribute to improving the quality of higher education in Europe

EQAR's particular mission is to manage a register of quality assurance agencies that demonstrate substantial compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). The Register allows stakeholders to identify quality assurance agencies that operate in line with agreed European principles, thus promoting the further development of a coherent and flexible external quality assurance system for Europe as a whole.

In order to fulfil this mission EQAR members agree on two strategic priorities for EQAR's work and as a basis for EQAR's future strategic plan:

- Promoting, through the Register, international trust and recognition of quality assurance agencies
- Increasing transparency and ensuring that information provided by EQAR is meaningful

Commitment of EHEA Governments

EQAR requires the active support and commitment of EHEA governments in order to develop and implement these strategic priorities, in particular as regards the acceptance and recognition of registered agencies.

EQAR's remit is to manage and promote the Register of quality assurance agencies complying substantially with the ESG. Legislation on higher education and quality assurance, however, is in the remit of national (or regional) governments and it thus requires commitment at national or regional levels to achieve recognition of registered quality assurance agencies throughout the EHEA.

Resources

Realising the two strategic priorities will require activities that cannot be implemented within EQAR's current, limited resources. Their realisation includes, for instance, detailed analyses of national legislation and recognition of EQAR-registered agencies, leading to a comprehensive report, additional communication measures, or including more elaborate information on (inter)national QA systems, registered agencies and their work. Such activities require additional financial and human resources. EQAR will thus seek to both differentiate its income streams by exploring third-party sources of funding and increasing membership revenue.

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European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)

Members consider it crucial that the EQAR perspective, based on the Register Committee experience, feeds substantially into the upcoming revision of the ESG.

The Register Committee works with the ESG for a unique purpose and from the perspective of EQAR's specific mission and objectives, distinct from those of other organisations. In the deliberations on the ESG revision, EQAR will have to ensure that the future revised ESG are fit for purpose as criteria for the Register.

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VI. Recommendations to Ministers

EQAR recommends that ministers take note of the strategic priorities defined by EQAR and commit to furthering recognition of registered agencies in the EHEA countries.

EQAR encourages all EHEA states that are currently not Governmental Members of EQAR to consider membership. In the long term, all EHEA states should be members of EQAR in order to ensure broadest possible ownership and support of the Register.

EQAR proposes the following text for the Bucharest Communiqué:

Ministers welcome the Report of the Expert Panel appointed to review the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) and note that the evaluation evidenced that EQAR's organisational structures and processes are fit for purpose, effective and efficient, and enjoy trust and confidence.

Ministers take note of the strategic priorities and follow-up of recommendations agreed by EQAR.

Ministers commit to further recognising EQAR-registered quality assurance agencies that, within the framework of national requirements, should be able to undertake activities throughout the EHEA. In particular, ministers commit to recognise quality assurance results and decisions of EQAR-registered agencies on joint and double degree programmes.

Ministers invite EQAR to report back to the next ministerial conference on the implementation of the external evaluation recommendations and progress made regarding the recognition of EQAR-registered agencies.

Annex: EQAR Mission and Objectives

The E4 Group's Report to the London Ministerial Conference (2007) set out the following objectives for EQAR:

- *promote student mobility by providing a basis for the increase of trust among higher education institutions*
- *reduce opportunities for dubious organisations or 'accreditation mills' to gain credibility*
- *provide a basis for national authorities 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 quality assurance agencies and to promote mutual trust amongst them.*

These were summarised in the London Communiqué as follows:

The purpose of the register is to allow all stakeholders and the general public open access to objective information about trustworthy quality assurance agencies that are working in line with the ESG. It will therefore enhance confidence in higher education in the EHEA and beyond, and facilitate the mutual recognition of quality assurance and accreditation decisions.

EQAR's Mission Statement sets out the following:

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.

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