Statement on the European Commission's Report on Progress in Quality Assurance

Brussels, 30 November 2009

1. EQAR is pleased that the European Commission's Report on progress in quality assurance of higher education[i] recognises EQAR's contribution to increasing transparency and trust in quality assurance of higher education in Europe.

2. EQAR manages a register of credible and legitimate quality assurance agencies that comply substantially with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG). The Register aims to enhance mutual trust as a basis for mutual recognition of quality assurance results and decisions. It aims to reduce opportunities for so-called "accreditation mills", dubious establishments that "accredit" spurious institutions to give them false credibility.

The European dimension in quality assurance

3. The ESG are the basis for a genuine European dimension in quality assurance. They enshrine shared European values and principles for internal and external quality assurance, including the cooperation between the relevant stakeholders, well-defined and transparent criteria and procedures as well as independence of quality assurance agencies.

4. Operating at European level, EQAR is part of the European dimension and promotes these common principles throughout the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The Register is open to all quality assurance agencies that commit to the ESG, regardless whether they are organised at national or European level, or based outside Europe.

5. EQAR facilitates cross-border activities and cooperation in external quality assurance. 8 of 17 quality assurance agencies on the Register[ii] have already been working with higher education institutions in two or more European countries.

The European quality assurance infrastructure

6. EQAR and other European associations and networks in the sector, such as the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) or the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA), assume different and complementary functions.

7. EQAR has the exclusive function to independently manage a Register of legitimate and credible quality assurance agencies operating in Europe. The relevant stakeholders jointly bear responsibility for EQAR's governance.

8. EQAR thus performs a unique function in the European quality assurance landscape. At the same time, EQAR does not duplicate the

activities of the other European actors referred to in the Report, in particular ENQA, which are predominantly membership bodies providing a network, services and support to their members.

9.　EQAR has noted with great interest the suggestions made in the Report for the further development of quality assurance in Europe. EQAR will take those into consideration in its internal discussions. In addition, the observations in the Report will be useful in the self-evaluation EQAR will produce and report in 2010.

Priority on transparency of external quality assurance

10.　EQAR underlines the primary responsibility of higher education institutions for their quality. External quality assurance builds upon this and often combines a balance of accountability-driven and enhancement-led objectives. Comprehensive external quality reviews incorporate the different perspectives of institutions, students, staff and external stakeholders, rather than to provide simple answers.

11.　EQAR calls upon those involved in the development of transparency tools, such as rankings or classifications, to refrain from suggesting a simplistic perspective on quality of higher education based on numbers and a seemingly universal definition of high quality. It should also be avoided that the vital balance between accountability and enhancement is distorted towards more or only control.

12.　External quality assurance should remain the main external tool for assuring and enhancing quality of higher education in Europe. It will have to focus on accessibility and readability of results, so as to clearly demonstrate its benefits and to improve transparency and trust.

13.　It is most appropriate to base transparency to all stakeholders in higher education on unbiased and comprehensive observations resulting from external QA which looks at the whole range of institutional activities from mission and strategy to performance results.

The European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)

14.　The European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) have developed into an important reference point for the development of internal and external quality assurance systems.

15.　Any revision should be carried out with due care. It should be based on thorough consultation of all stakeholders on their experience in using and working with the ESG. The importance of the existence of stable and reliable criteria for external quality assurance agencies that seek inclusion on EQAR should be borne in mind.

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i See: http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/report09_en.pdf
ii See: http://www.eqar.eu/register.html