

EQAR Members' Dialogue

11/12 October 2012

Bucharest

Venue:

Hotel Intercontinental

4 Bulevardul Nicolae Balcescu, Bucharest 010051

Hosted by the:

**Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research,
Development and Innovation Funding in Romania
(UEFISCDI)**

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Objectives

The objectives of this year's Members' Dialogue are to contribute to the development of a strategic plan for EQAR and to consult members on the revision of the Procedures for Applications, prepared by the Register Committee.

In January 2012, the General Assembly agreed upon two strategic priorities for EQAR:

1. International Trust and Recognition

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

2. Transparency and Information

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

Based on these priorities, the Members' Dialogue will be an opportunity to elaborate EQAR's vision and strategic goals in greater detail and to discuss specific future activities in different areas with a view to achieving the strategic goals.

To inform the discussion the Executive Board will prepare a first draft strategic plan. Based on the discussions at the Members' Dialogue the Board will then develop a second, more elaborate draft for discussion and adoption at the EQAR General Assembly in 2013.

The Register Committee has prepared a draft revision of the Procedures for Applications. The revision aims to implement some of the specific recommendations made by the external evaluation panel in 2011. This includes the future publication of decisions on applications for inclusion on the Register.

Participants

- EQAR members:
31 governments; E4 organisations: ENQA, ESU, EUA, EURASHE; BUSINESSSEUROPE, Education International
Permanent observers: Council of Europe, UNESCO, European Commission, Bologna Secretariat
- EQAR committees:
Executive Board, Register Committee, Appeals Committee
- EQAR Secretariat

Wednesday 10 October 2012

Arrival of participants

Thursday 11 October 2012

9:30 Opening Session

- Welcome by **Lesley Wilson**, President of the EQAR Executive Board
- Welcome by **Ecaterina Andronescu**, Minister of Education, Research, Youth and Sport of Romania
- Introduction of the meeting objectives and agenda

10:00 Keynote presentation:

The Bologna Process after the Bucharest Summit – Future Challenges for Quality Assurance and EQAR

Chair: **Lesley Wilson**, President of the Executive Board

Speaker: **Peter Maassen**, Department of Educational Research, University of Oslo, and Director, Higher Education Development Association (Hedda)

- What are the key challenges that external quality assurance systems face in Europe?
- How can external quality assurance systems achieve sufficient trust to be internationally recognised?
- What new challenges does the Bucharest Communiqué bring for quality assurance and EQAR?

Followed by a discussion:

How to realise EQAR's strategic priorities in the developing context and address the new challenges?

11:15 Coffee break

11:45 Case study presentations

Chair: **Eric Froment**, Chair of the Register Committee

Input: **Nina Mares**, Department of Education and Training, Flemish Community of Belgium

Remus Pricopie, Rector of the National School for Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA), Romania

In this session, experiences and challenges will be presented from two higher education systems that decided to recognise all foreign, EQAR-registered agencies in their quality

assurance system. What lessons can EQAR learn from the two examples? How to promote further to the Bucharest Communiqué commitment to “allow EQAR-registered quality assurance agencies to perform their activities across the EHEA”?

13:30

Lunch

(served at the venue)

15:00

Parallel sessions on different aspects of EQAR's strategy

1. International Trust and Recognition

How to promote trust in and recognition of registered agencies and their decisions? How to realise the commitments of the Bucharest Communiqué?

2. Enhancing the Usefulness of the Register

What information to provide on the Register for which target groups? How to construct the chain from EQAR to teaching and learning on the ground?

3. Criteria for Inclusion

What standards are needed for the Register in the future? What do members and other stakeholders expect the Register to ensure and “stand for”? What are EQAR's expectations from the future ESG?

Further descriptions of the parallel sessions are available on the following pages.

16:30

Coffee break

17:00

Consultation session:

Revision of the EQAR Procedures for Applications

Input: Lucien Bollaert, Vice-Chair, EQAR Register Committee

Members are invited to comment on the Register Committee's draft revised Procedures for Applications. The revised Procedures as well as an explanatory note will be circulated before the meeting.

18:30

End

20:00

Conference Dinner

Restaurant Crama Domneasca, Selari Street 13-15, District 3

Friday 12 October 2012

- 9:30** **Parallel Sessions (continued)**
- 11:00** **Coffee break**
- 11:30** **Conclusions from Parallel Sessions**
- Chair: **Colin Tück**, EQAR Director
- Input: rapporteurs of the three parallel sessions
- Key messages from the parallel sessions along the guiding questions, presented by rapporteurs
- 12:30** **Towards a Strategic Plan – the next steps**
- Chair: **Lesley Wilson**, President of the Executive Board
- How the Members' Dialogue discussions will be taken forward and incorporated in the draft strategic plan
 - Key changes to be taken in the next draft, based on the discussion at the Members' Dialogue
 - Concluding discussion
- 14:00** **Lunch and departure**

(agenda as of 5/10/12)

Parallel Session 1:

International Trust and Recognition

Chair: **Lesley Wilson**, President, EQAR Executive Board

Each session addresses a different aspect of the strategic priorities of EQAR, as agreed by the General Assembly (January 2012), both from the point of view of EQAR's mission, as well as looking at the instruments needed to achieve it. The main questions for all parallel session are:

- What should be the specific goals and activities under each strategic priority, in order for EQAR to achieve its goals?
- What is the relation between EQAR and other actors as part of pursuing its strategic priorities? Where and how should EQAR cooperate with partners to ensure ownership and reach different target groups effectively?
- How can EQAR acquire sufficient resources to implement the agreed measures and activities?

The themes, specific guiding questions and a summary of background information for this session are set out below.

Themes

- EQAR's contribution to building a coherent and trustworthy European quality assurance system, that underpins the pan-European recognition of qualifications based on QA;
- Improve the trust in the quality of EQAR-registered quality assurance agencies and enhance mutual trust between them;
- Improve the recognition of EQAR-registered agencies and their decisions within different national contexts and by European authorities, so as to allow them to operate throughout the EHEA;

Guiding Questions

- How can an open European area for external QA be fostered, while safeguarding the key functions of QA to robustly assure threshold quality and minimum standards, as well as to promote continuous improvement? How can higher education institutions be empowered to work with diverse EQAR-registered QA agencies or, identifying quality assurance processes that best suit their diverse missions?

- How can EQAR contribute to increasing trust in quality (assurance) of cross-border higher education?
- How can the recognition of quality assurance decisions of EQAR-registered agencies on joint and double degree programmes facilitate quality assurance of such programmes?
- How could official recognition of EQAR-registered agencies enhance the academic and professional recognition of qualifications?
- What issues would be important to address in the analysis on the recognition of EQAR-registered agencies throughout the EHEA?

Relevant information

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

“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 January¹ 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.” (GA6/02.1, page 3)

“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:

¹ September 2012: Austria, **Flemish Community of Belgium**, Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, **Kazakhstan**, Lithuania, Poland and Romania

- 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." (page 11–12)

Bucharest Communiqué (April 2012)

"Quality assurance is essential for building trust and to reinforce the attractiveness of the EHEA's offerings, including in the provision of cross-border education. We commit to both maintaining the public responsibility for quality assurance and to actively involve a wide range of stakeholders in this development.[...] We welcome the external evaluation of EQAR and we encourage quality assurance agencies to apply for registration. We will allow EQAR-registered agencies to perform their activities across the EHEA, while complying with national requirements. In particular, we will aim to recognise quality assurance decisions of EQAR-registered agencies on joint and double degree programmes." (page 2)

Parallel Session 2:

Enhancing the Usefulness of the Register

Chair: **Allan Päll**, Vice-President, EQAR Executive Board

Each session addresses a different aspect of the strategic priorities of EQAR, as agreed by the General Assembly (January 2012), both from the point of view of EQAR's mission, as well as looking at the instruments needed to achieve it. The main questions for all parallel session are:

- What should be the specific goals and activities under each strategic priority, in order for EQAR to achieve its goals?
- What is the relation between EQAR and other actors as part of pursuing its strategic priorities? Where and how should EQAR cooperate with partners to ensure ownership and reach different target groups effectively?
- How can EQAR acquire sufficient resources to implement the agreed measures and activities?

The themes, specific guiding questions and a summary of background information for this session are set out below.

Themes

- Increasing public access to meaningful information which EQAR can provide in a sustainable, comparative and coherent manner about quality assurance systems, the registered agencies and their work for different users;
- Ensuring the reliability and fitness for purpose of the information provided by EQAR;
- EQAR's indirect contribution to fostering student-centred learning and mobility of students and staff.

Guiding Questions

- What are the target groups that EQAR should primarily address and what information is relevant for the different target groups?
- What measures should be taken to explain EQAR's mission and functioning to those audiences that are currently less aware?

- What information could EQAR provide about QA systems, the registered agencies and their work, in a reliable way? Could EQAR build on existing initiatives, such as the QROSSROADS² project?
- How to ensure that information is provided in a sustainable, comparative and coherent manner, taking into account the current and foreseen future resources?
- What measures could be taken to enhance transparency, in addition to those implemented by the revised Procedures for Applications?
- How can the principles used by EQAR as criteria for inclusion be better explained and promoted outside of the EHEA?

Relevant information

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

“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.” (page 12 – 13, document GA6/02.1)

²<http://www.grossroads.eu/home>

Bucharest Communiqué (April 2012)

“We will strive to make higher education systems easier to understand for the public, and especially for students and employers. We will support the improvement of current and developing transparency tools in order to make them more user-driven and to ground them on empirical evidence. We aim to reach an agreement on common guidelines for transparency by 2015.” (page 4)

“At the European level, in preparation of the Ministerial Conference in 2015 and together with relevant stakeholders, we will:[...]

- Promote quality, transparency, employability and mobility in the third cycle, while also building additional bridges between the EHEA and the ERA;[...]
- Develop EHEA guidelines for transparency policies and continue to monitor current and developing transparency tools.” (page 5)

Parallel Session 3:

Criteria for Inclusion

Chair: **Lucien Bollaert**, Vice-Chair, EQAR Register Committee

Each session addresses a different aspect of the strategic priorities of EQAR, as agreed by the General Assembly (January 2012), both from the point of view of EQAR's mission, as well as looking at the instruments needed to achieve it. The main questions for all parallel session are:

- What should be the specific goals and activities under each strategic priority, in order for EQAR to achieve its goals?
- What is the relation between EQAR and other actors as part of pursuing its strategic priorities? Where and how should EQAR cooperate with partners to ensure ownership and reach different target groups effectively?
- How can EQAR acquire sufficient resources to implement the agreed measures and activities?

The themes, specific guiding questions and a summary of background information for this session are set out below.

Themes

- Criteria needed for the Register with a view to maximising trust
- EQAR's use of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) as criteria for inclusion on the Register

Guiding Questions

- What should registration on EQAR stand for? What should be the key message to higher education institutions, students and governments?
- What objectives do the criteria have to address to enhance international trust and recognition? How could trust in registered agencies be enhanced by appropriate criteria?
- What will be the impact of the revision of the ESG by the E4 Group in cooperation with BUSINESSEUROPE, Education International and EQAR? What are the main issues to be fed by EQAR into the revision of the ESG?

- Does EQAR need additional or more specific criteria in order to achieve the necessary trust and recognition?

Relevant Information

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

“The key prerequisite for this trend [towards widespread international recognition] 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.” (GA6/02.1, page 3)

“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 [...]

Specific aims:

- [...]
- engage in the revision of the ESG with a view to ensuring that they are a good basis for EQAR’s work;” (page 11)

“ix. 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. [...]

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”. [...]

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.” (page 8)

Bucharest Communiqué (April 2012)

“We will revise the ESG to improve their clarity, applicability and usefulness, including their scope. The revision will be based upon an initial proposal to be prepared by the E4 in cooperation with Education International, BUSINESSEUROPE and the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), which will be submitted to the Bologna Follow-Up Group.” (page 2)

“We are determined to remove outstanding obstacles hindering effective and proper recognition and are willing to work together towards the automatic recognition of comparable academic degrees, building on the tools of the Bologna framework, as a long-term goal of the EHEA. We therefore [...] encourage higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies to assess institutional recognition procedures in internal and external quality assurance.” (page 4)