

EQAR Strategy 2018 - 2022

adopted by the 14th General Assembly, April 2018

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1. EQAR – a pillar of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)

Realising the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is the common goal set by the 48 European governments who participate in the Bologna Process, supported by the European Union and the consultative members.

The EHEA aims to promote mobility of students and staff and to facilitate cooperation between countries and higher education institutions, e.g. through bilateral agreements, leagues, joint and double degrees. Mobility and cooperation will catalyse the functioning of a European labour market and further the internationalisation of teaching and learning.

While a broad range of policies have been agreed within the Bologna Process, three key commitments were identified as the main pillars of the EHEA¹:

1. A harmonised educational landscape through the three-cycle structure based on a common qualifications framework (QF-EHEA)
2. Agreed principles for the recognition of qualifications as set out in the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC)
3. Robust internal and external quality assurance in line with agreed Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG)

These instruments are underpinned by the EHEA's basic values of academic freedom and autonomous institutions.

One of the key commitments, quality assurance (QA) is essential for both quality enhancement and accountability, with a common framework for QA laid down in the ESG adopted by governments.

Higher education institutions have the primary responsibility for quality and its assurance, while external QA, carried out by independent QA agencies, enables institutions to demonstrate accountability and helps institutions improve. Together, they ensure a learning environment in which the content of study programmes, learning opportunities and facilities are fit for purpose.

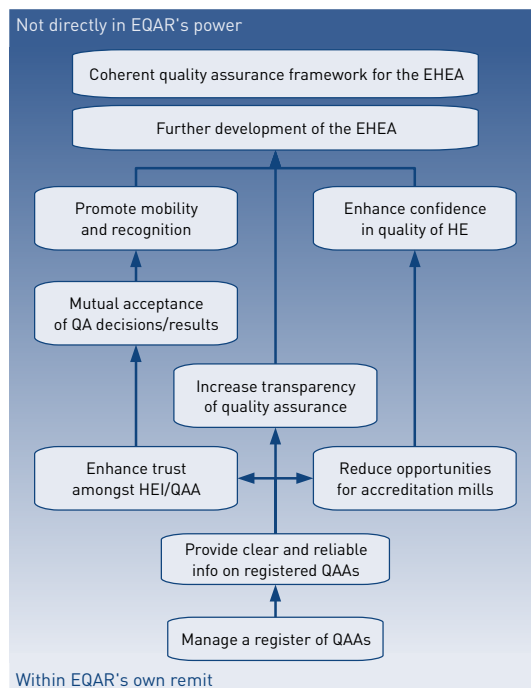
¹ See

http://media.ehea.info/file/20180205-06-Sofia/71/7/BFUG_BG_SR_58_4c_AG3WG2P_proposal_889717.pdf (replace by reference to Paris Communiqué after adoption)

EQAR was established by the Bologna Process as part of the EHEA's quality assurance infrastructure, to manage the EHEA's Register of agencies that are substantially compliant with ESG, serving as a tool for transparency and information. EQAR thus fulfils a public function and acts in the public interest. EQAR's broad membership of stakeholders and governments represents the public interest in the governance of the organisation.

Though modest and specific, EQAR's role is important as a basis for international trust in quality of European higher education, and thus for recognition and

cooperation. Strengthening European cooperation is a shared aspiration of all parties involved in the Bologna Process, governments as well as stakeholder organisations.



(from Self-Evaluation Report)

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2. Strategic goals

The two strategic goals identified in EQAR's first Strategic Plan 2013-2017 stemmed logically from its specific role and mission. Consistent with the [Self-Evaluation Report 2016](#) and the resulting agreement not to change the mission, also the strategic goals remain valid.

While not changed in substance, their exact wording was changed to take account of the changed realities.

The first² strategic goal relates to what EQAR is doing and what lies in its own power, i.e. to enhance transparency and information.

The second strategic goal relates to the impact of EQAR. While EQAR can provide the foundation for trust and recognition, achievement of that goal does not lie in EQAR's power alone and depends on various other actors.

Vision

EQAR's vision is a coherent quality assurance framework for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in which higher education institutions have the freedom to turn to a suitable EQAR-registered agency for their external quality assurance reviews, and in which qualifications are thus universally recognised.

² Note: the order of the two strategic goals has been swapped so as to reflect a clear logic. - to be removed from final document

Strategic Goal 1: Transparency and Information

EQAR provides reliable and widely-used information on registered quality assurance agencies as well as on which higher education institutions or programmes have been subject to external quality assurance in line with the ESG.

Strategic Goal 2: International Trust and Recognition

EQAR-registered agencies and their QA results are recognised across the EHEA. On that basis, qualifications that were subject to external quality assurance by registered agencies (whether at institutional or programme level) are recognised and, in line with national requirements, higher education institutions are allowed to work with a suitable registered agency to fulfil their formal external quality assurance obligations.

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EQAR's activities are underpinned by the values formulated in its mission statement: independence; transparency; openness to diversity; proportionate, consistent and fair decision-making; and continuous improvement.

3. Activities earmarked for 2018 – 2022

EQAR's core activity is to manage the Register in a fair and consistent way, through its Register Committee. This includes the decision-making on inclusion and periodic renewal, as well as the monitoring and accountability measures in place between the periodic renewals: annual updates, reporting of substantive changes and third-party complaints.

All other activities are auxiliary to and build on this core activity, in order to promote the wider goals formulated in EQAR's mission.

Taking account of the recommendations in the Self-Evaluation Report, the following specific activities are earmarked under the two strategic goals.

The specific activities will be detailed and prioritised through EQAR's rolling Work Plans.

3.1 Transparency and information

- Maintain the register of quality assurance agencies and provide public information
- Establish a database of external quality assurance results and promote its use by different stakeholders
- Ensure that EQAR's instruments for monitoring agencies are seen as effective by agencies and policy makers
- Use analyses of the Register Committee's decisions as well as the information available on registered agencies and their activities to provide the sector with statistics and analyses

- Maintain the active dialogue and communication with ENQA as the main review coordinator and representative body of agencies

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3.2 Trust and recognition

- Maintain the public knowledge base on legal frameworks for external QA and cross-border recognition, including the use of the European Approach for QA of Joint Programmes
- Encourage EHEA governments to use EQAR registration as a basis to recognise external QA results and reduce duplication of efforts
- Maintain the information exchange with the ENIC-NARIC networks to promote the role of external QA and EQAR to support (automatic) recognition of qualifications
- Contribute to the EHEA working structure where relevant and appropriate in light of EQAR's specific role
- Reach out to the remaining EHEA countries to identify the reasons for not becoming governmental members and encourage them to join EQAR

4. Indicators to monitor progress

- Number of applicant QA agencies (compared with the total number of QA agencies operating in Europe)
- Number of and feedback from visitors to the EQAR website and the database of external quality assurance results (DEQAR)
- Number of countries using external quality assurance in line with the ESG, by an EQAR-registered agency, as a sufficient condition for recognition of qualifications
- Number of countries allowing higher education institutions to use a suitable EQAR-registered QA agency to fulfil their external quality assurance obligations (legislation with reference to EQAR)
- Number of countries recognising decisions of all EQAR-registered QA agencies on joint programmes
- EQAR's governmental membership (goal: at least 90% of the EHEA countries by 2022)

5. Outlook

Based on the Strategy 2018 – 2022, EQAR will undertake its next self-evaluation, followed by a second external evaluation, in 2021/22.

Annex 1: Mission Statement

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Vision

EQAR's vision is a coherent quality assurance framework for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in which higher education institutions have the freedom to turn to any EQAR-registered agency for their external quality assurance reviews, and in which qualifications are thus universally recognised .

Mission

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

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

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

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

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

Values

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

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

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

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