

Cross-border recognition of QA

Briefing Note for the Members' Dialogue 2021

(session 1.2)

1. Main findings

Cross-border external QA is carried out by 2/3 of registered agencies

The Annual Update information provided by EQAR-registered quality assurance agencies show that cross-border external QA is regularly carried out within and outside the European Higher Education area by two thirds of registered agencies. In 2019, over half of the 49 registered QA agencies have reported external QA activities in a country other than the one where the agency is based in.

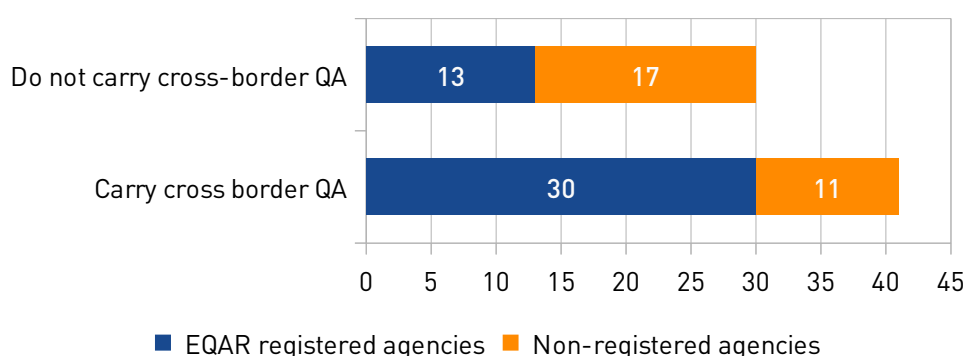


Figure 1: Cross-border QA by registered and non-registered agencies

The 2020 self-evaluation survey of QA agency survey further showed that a higher share of EQAR-registered agencies tend to be engaged in cross-border external QA activities (69%) compared to non-registered agencies (39%).

While CBQA represents a small share of agencies activities, this is widespread across the EHEA (and beyond)

The overall share of the cross-border external QA activities, compared to the 'home reviews' of these agencies, ranges from 6-8%. This share varies strongly between QA agencies, from 100% to less than 50%.

Over the past six years, cross-border external QA activities have covered most (90%) of the EHEA member countries. The analysis of QA agencies activities also showed an increased interest for cross-border external QA activities with an EQAR-registered agency from higher education institutions outside the EHEA. In 2019 the volume of cross-border external QA in HE systems outside EHEA even surpassed the number of cross-border reviews carried out within EHEA.

Higher education institutions are seeking an EQAR-registered agency for their external QA

Higher education institutions within and beyond the EHEA are often seeking an ESG-review by a QA agencies from a certain country or region or a specialised/field specific QA agency. Their interest is often a manifestation of higher education institutions' international aspirations and also a recognition of their wish to be evaluated in different ways.

Recognition of cross-border reviews desired but not always available

The Annual Updates from QA agencies showed that in the EHEA, cross-border reviews are most often carried out in countries that recognise the activity of EQAR-registered agencies as part of the regular quality assurance framework (i.e. Romania, Kazakhstan, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Germany, Luxembourg). However, also voluntary external QA activities (not part of the external QA system) persist to a considerable extent across the EHEA.

Reflecting on the recognition of an EQAR-registered agency 6 of the 7 surveyed national association of HEIs responded that they would want the legal framework to allow for to review of a HEI with a suitable foreign EQAR-registered agencies to meet the obligatory external quality assurance requirement, but they also added that the EQA decision should be confirmed/ratified by a national/regional QA agency.

Timid developments in the openness of external QA frameworks to EQAR-registered agencies

With a view to legal frameworks opening up to allow higher education institutions to choose an EQAR-registered agency, we see timid developments. Currently, 31 of the 49 EHEA systems have put in place legislative provisions to allow (all or some) higher education institutions to request accreditation, evaluation or audit from a foreign quality assurance agency, with only half (19 of these systems making a specific reference to using a suitable EQAR-registered, ESG-compliant agency and thus making full use of the established European framework for quality assurance.

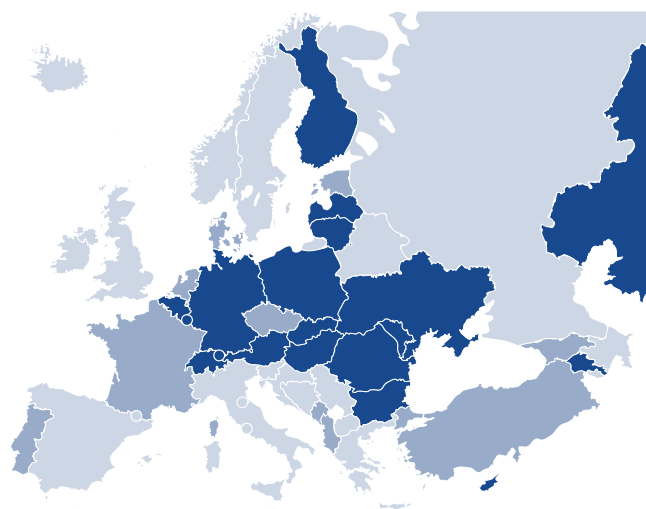


Figure 2: Openness to Cross-Border External QA

To support registered agencies activities across border, as well as higher education institutions and national authorities, EQAR together with ENQA, ESU, EUA and EURASHE set up an ad-hoc working group in 2017 to develop considerations that would guide stakeholders engaging in cross-border QA.

The result of the group's work, draws on prior experience in the topic and consultations with various stakeholders and has been captured within the publication '[Key Considerations for Cross-Border Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area](#)'.

In addition to the above guide, EQAR also carries out yearly analysis on agency's cross-border EQA activities (following the Annual Update from QA agencies) and also keeps a close look on any new development in cross-border external QA. Such developments and analysis are disseminated to EQAR members but also shared within relevant seminar and conferences.

2. Questions for discussion

1. What can EQAR do to reduce regulatory barriers and allow quality assurance agencies to be formally recognised across borders?
2. Why are countries hesitant to recognise registered QA agency's results?
3. How can EQAR facilitate the opening of national legislation for cross-border QA beyond exchanging information and organising events for governments?
4. How proactive and direct should EQAR be in its approach of national governments?

3. References

- [EQAR Self-Evaluation Survey for Members and Potential Members](#)
- [EQAR Self-Evaluation Survey for QA agencies](#)
- [Cross-border QA activities](#) (annual data)
- [External Quality Assurance in Europe](#) (Policy Brief July 2020)