

Analysis, policy briefs & serving the EHEA

Briefing Note for the Members' Dialogue 2021

(sessions 1.4 & 2.4)

1. Main findings

EQAR accumulates a substantial amount of information from its core register function and processes, data collected annually from registered agencies and the monitoring of legal frameworks for external QA in the EHEA. More recently, DEQAR has added to the wealth of information. So far, EQAR provided two types of analyses:

1. Analyses based on the Register Committee's decisions on ESG compliance: the Annual Reports have included a basic analysis; in 2018 EQAR published a more comprehensive analysis, shedding light on areas where ESG compliance is frequently challenging;
2. On the state and development of external QA in Europe: previously part of the Annual Reports, since 2020 a separate Policy Brief on the state of external QA in the EHEA has been published.

1.1 Dissemination

The survey responses gave a clear indication that several members expect more analytical output from EQAR: even though the majority of members is satisfied, "providing the sector with statistics and analyses" was one of the two areas (next to monitoring) with the largest number of members unsure or considering it not addressed sufficiently. In the feedback from QA agencies this was the area with the largest number of "don't know/not sure" responses.

The comments note that existing analyses are not sufficiently well-known (e.g. ENQA noted that "the wealth of information and its multiple uses could be even more advertised to the community"), interesting data and information remains "under-utilised". The European Commission, for example, considered that EQAR had "valuable information available to showcase trust among different quality assurance systems", but that this was "less visible" at present.

The website statistics corroborate that: only ca. 4% (July – December 2020, Annual Report not counted) of visits to the EQAR website come across these various analyses. At the same time, statistics show that those who do come across them are the more intense users, spending more than twice as long on the website on average and visiting twice as many pages.

While one country suggested peer-learning activities and "workshops" organised by EQAR together with member countries for local stakeholders

in higher education, most respondents did not indicate specifically how they consider existing analyses should be better disseminated.

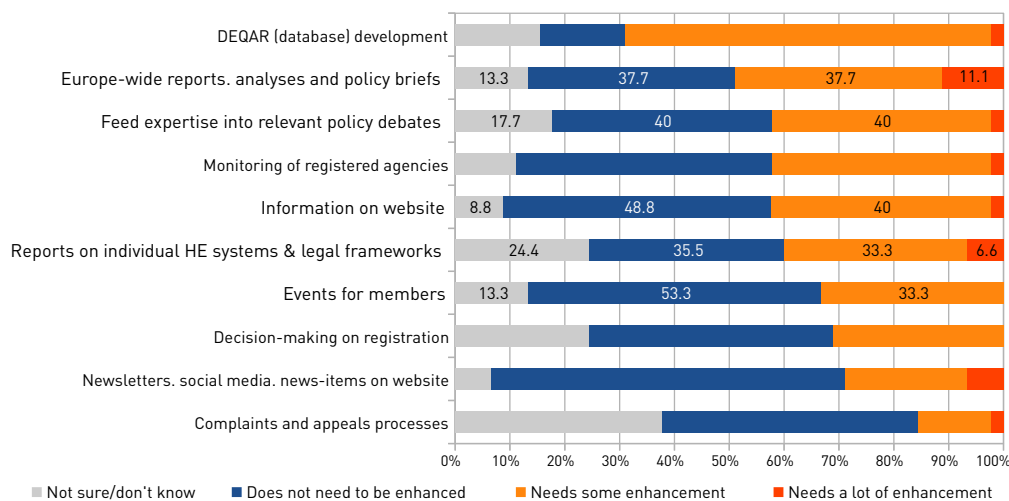


Figure 1: areas for enhancement (members and potential members, n=45)

1.2 Topics and Areas for Additional Analysis

Many respondents saw a potential for EQAR to make better use of the data and knowledge base it has, and to use analyses and policy briefs to increase its visibility. One comment noted that EQAR might strengthen “the robustness and validity of the evidence-base” by providing data and analysis, also in synergy with other data sets.

Both countries and stakeholders see a need for “punctual short briefings” on the “state of the art” of external QA in Europe and key developments. In terms of topics, they either referred generically to “new quality trends” or “various innovations in teaching and learning” and how they influence QA, or mentioned some well-know current trends such as online QA procedures, the QA of e-learning or the QA of micro-credentials. One QA agency specifically was interested in basic indicators on registered agencies, e.g. size, organisation and type of activities.

A few respondents would find it useful for EQAR to provide country-specific analyses or briefings, e.g. “country-level statistics and information on QA reports” or recommendations on “unrealised opportunities and possible improvements”.

Some responses suggested that EQAR cooperate with ENQA on such analyses, which would of course have to take due account of the specific roles (see following).

It is clear from the responses that – while the assessment of the current situation is very similar – the demand comes mainly from governments and stakeholders, less from QA agencies. This is something to keep in mind in discussing topics and areas; it might also help better articulating the different roles of EQAR and ENQA.

1.3 Public-Interest Role of EQAR

Several respondents accompanied their comments with “words of caution”, highlighting EQAR’s specific role as a gatekeeper serving the public interest, rather than having a “representational” role.

At the same time, several respondent recognised that EQAR builds a significant expertise from carrying out this role, which is already highly valued and could be even better used in the future. One respondent highlighted that EQAR brings together “all different players” in a unique way and could thus provide information relevant for a wide range of users; another respondent noted that EQAR should provide independent and “value-neutral” information.

Overall, responses suggest that there is a wish for EQAR to feed into and enrich the relevant policy debates with its experience and expertise (see Figure 1), without steering policy itself and being misunderstood as a representative body.

1.4 Reaching out to the higher education sector

Several respondents noted that the general knowledge and awareness about the European quality assurance framework – and thus about EQAR – is low amongst the higher education community.

This became visible through a survey distributed to national associations of higher education institutions (via EUA & EURASHE), which only attracted seven responses unfortunately. This shows in itself that interest is not keen. Those who responded roughly knew about EQAR, but stressed the need to spread more information about EQAR, the importance of the European QA framework and the relevance for individual HEIs.

Groups mentioned by survey respondents to whom EQAR might reach out included higher education institutions, “average” academics, students, credential evaluators, employers and citizens at large. It, however, requires further discussion to what extent EQAR should look for more direct engagement, which stakeholders to target and what would be the purpose.

Several respondents suggested generally to be “more visible for students and HEIs”, with EQAR’s relevance mostly linked to DEQAR as the only pan-European database of QA reports. One governmental member suggested specifically to work with students’ unions and to link to study portals etc., “so that interested students get also the piece of QA, EQAR when deciding what to study at what higher education institution”.

One respondent illustrated that reaching other groups would require changes also to the way EQAR presents itself: “the information available in the EQAR site is thought to be sought and found by someone who is perfectly adapted to both terminology and organisation of QA in the EHEA. An

"outsider" from the sector of people coming from different HE settings could find the information less user-friendly".

2. Questions for discussion

Analyses and Policy Briefs (session 1.4)

1. Are members aware of the analyses and publications that exist already? How could we make better known what we have?
2. Which elements of the current analyses/policy briefs are most meaningful and relevant, which less?
3. What do governments and stakeholders need and find useful:
 1. Which topics are of interest?
 2. What format is the most beneficial?
4. Which other data sets carry high potential for meaningful correlated analyses? (Examples mentioned: ETER, U-Multirank, the EU Graduate Tracking initiative and Eurostudent)
5. What kind of individualised, per-country analyses would be useful and relevant for members?

Serving the European Higher Education Area (session 2.4)

6. How do countries benefit currently from their EQAR membership?
7. Other than analyses and policy briefs (see above), what else could EQAR do to help members improve their QA system?
8. In particular, how can we ensure ongoing relevance for countries with well-developed, mature QA systems?
9. Should EQAR work on raising awareness of other stakeholders (e.g. "grass-root" academics and students)? What should be the priority?

3. References

- [EQAR Self-Evaluation Survey for Members and Potential Members](#)
- [EQAR Self-Evaluation Survey for QA agencies](#)
- Analyses of Register Committee decisions:
 - [Findings from Register Committee decisions](#) (August 2018)
 - [Annual Reports](#)
- Analyses of the state of external QA in Europe:
 - [External Quality Assurance in Europe](#) (Policy Brief July 2020)
 - [Statistics from DEQAR](#) (refreshed regularly)
 - [Cross-border QA activities](#) (annual data)