

Agency vs System Level

Briefing Note for the Members' Dialogue 2021 (session 2.1)

1. Main findings

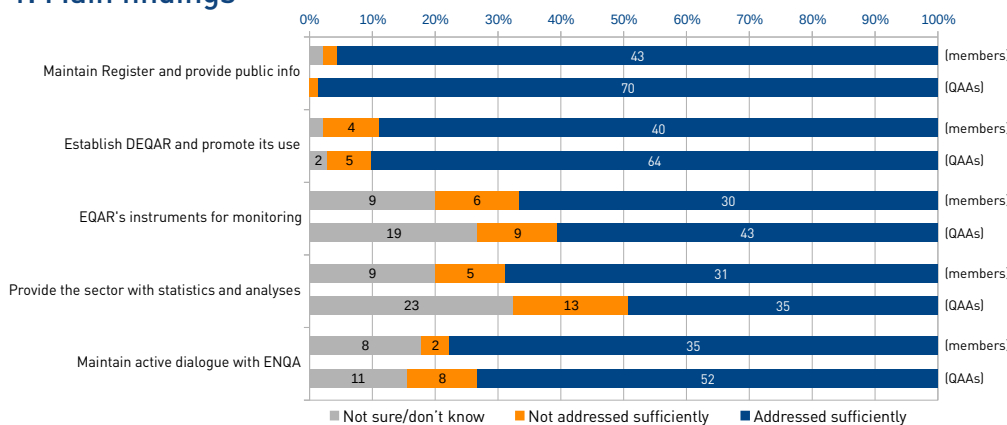


Figure 1: Strategic Goal “Trust and Recognition” (Gov&Stakeholder Survey & QA agency Survey)

With a view to EQAR’s Strategic Goal “Trust and recognition” the majority of governments and stakeholder respondents consider that EQAR has addressed sufficiently most of its objectives (see above answers in blue). However the respondents assessment showed that a number of areas would require further work (see above answers in orange) i.e. reaching out to the remaining 9 EHEA countries to join EQAR, in encouraging EHEA governments to use EQAR’s

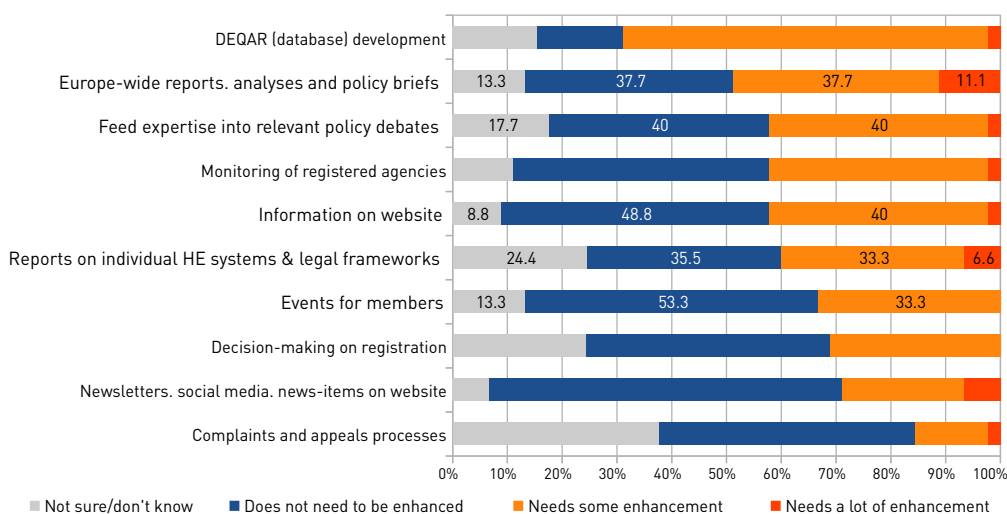


Figure 2: Areas in which EQAR could enhance its work (members)

registration as a basis to recognise external QA results and reduce duplication of efforts and in ensuring their HE systems are more compatible with the ESG.

With a view to areas where EQAR could enhance its work to better support the building of the EHEA, a high number of answers call for the further development of the database (nearly 70% of answers), followed by the need for Europe-wide reports, analyses and policy briefs, feeding more expertise into policy debates relevant to EQAR's mission, **the monitoring of registered agencies** as well as further **website information on countries** (all >40%).

EQAR's current focus is the compliance of QA agencies, irrespective of each agency's profile, scope or level of maturity, and with limited possibilities to take into account the HE system(s) in which agencies operate. It is, however, becoming more frequent that several agencies share responsibilities in one HE system and that an agency's work (and compliance with the ESG) depends on system-level regulations or decisions made by other agencies. In Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, for example, different agencies are in charge of different elements in a suite of external QA processes, or even different agencies are responsible for different steps within a QA procedure (e.g. review by one agency, decision by another body).

The existing legal frameworks may in some cases make it difficult or impossible for QA agencies to comply with the ESG. In cases where agencies have a limited involvement in determining the criteria they work with they may have troubles meeting the requirement of ESG 2.2 (Designing methodologies fit for purpose), as this is already defined in detail by the legal framework or by the ministry.

Compliance with ESG 2.7 (Complaints and appeals) may be also challenging as the appeal of decisions resulting from an external QA activity is often regulated by the ministry and does not fall under the agency's own responsibility.

In some higher education systems, the legal framework implies that reports can only be published (ESG 2.6 Reporting) with the express permission of the institution in question, therefore making it hard for agencies to publish all reports, especially those with a negative outcome, and comply with the standard. EHEA members are nevertheless expected to ensure that legislation is not a barrier to implementing the ESG and thus ensure that QA agencies can meet the expectations of compliance for EQAR registration.

2. Questions for discussion

1. Should EQAR take a more active role in contacting its governmental members in cases where the national framework does not allow for the agency to be substantially compliant with one or more of the ESG standards?
2. How could EQAR raise flags or alerts about system-level issues? Which formal and informal channels could be used?
3. How could EQAR members help to encourage the remaining non-member EHEA countries to consider membership, solve any uncertainties they have and thus establish a better communication channel also with those countries?

4. How else could EQAR take into account the system level within or complementary to the registration process based on agency reviews?
5. With a view to the monitoring of registered agencies, how can this be further enhanced?
6. What other details, facts or figures could be included into EQAR's country page information so as to be better suited to member's needs?

3. References

- [EQAR Self-Evaluation Survey for Members and Potential Members](#)
- [EQAR Self-Evaluation Survey for QA agencies](#)
- [Findings from Register Committee decisions](#) (August 2018)