

eqar ///  
2009

## European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) aisbl/ivzw

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## /// Forewords

### Foreword from the President of the Executive Board

Dear readers,

It is a pleasure to present this Annual Report after a fruitful and exciting year for the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR). After a successful start and inclusion of the first three quality assurance agencies in 2008, we have seen EQAR becoming consolidated and attracting an impressive number of applicants in 2009.

It was a great pleasure to join the EQAR Executive Board and take over its presidency as from April 2009. Even though the very initial steps had already been taken by then, plenty of new territory remained to be explored. The first discussions on the external evaluation of EQAR were crucial for the organisation and an exciting venture at the same time. I am confident that this process will strengthen EQAR in fulfilling its mission of increasing transparency, trust and confidence in European higher education, and thus promoting student mobility and recognition.

It has been an honour to chair the Executive Board of the first European higher education organisation that is successfully managed by a genuine partnership of higher education in-

stitutions, students and quality assurance agencies. I wish to thank my fellow Executive Board members for their commitment as well as the open and constructive spirit of our work.

We are pleased that this report will be available to European ministers responsible for higher education when meeting in Budapest and Vienna to mark the 'Bologna Process' anniversary this March. EQAR and its partnership approach are key achievements of the Bologna Process and will continue to strengthen quality as a fundamental dimension of higher education reform.



Bruno Carapinha  
President of the Executive Board  
January 2010

## Foreword from the Chair of the Register Committee

Dear readers,

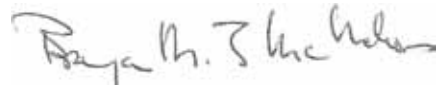
The Register of quality assurance agencies has grown substantially during the past year. Less than two years after the founding of EQAR and after only three application rounds, we can be more than satisfied to have seventeen European quality assurance agencies on the Register.

By the end of 2009, about 30 quality assurance agencies had their compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) reviewed externally - 22 of those had already applied for inclusion on EQAR. The Register Committee has been grateful for this clear sign of agencies' interest in being included on EQAR. This shows that the Register is a worthwhile validation exercise for agencies who wish to demonstrate legitimacy and credibility at European level.

During the first three application rounds, the Register Committee has adapted to its role and has established a solid body of precedents. The decision-making process on applications, however, is not a routine exercise: each application has to be considered on its own unique facts, and new, unprecedented questions continue to arise.

The Register Committee's professionalism and integrity remain crucial to EQAR's success. I am grateful that many of the highly experienced and motivated colleagues will continue to serve on the Register Committee for a second mandate, and this allows me to end my mandate as the Chair with the confidence that everything remains in good hands.

I offer my best wishes to my designated successor as well as to all members of the Register Committee in continuing to live up to its high standards.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bryan M. McMahon". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Bryan McMahon  
Chair of the Register Committee  
January 2010

**”Comprehensive external quality reviews incorporate the different perspectives of institutions, students, staff and external stakeholders, rather than to provide simple answers.“**

(EQAR Statement on the European Commission Progress Report)

## /// Introduction and context

The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) was founded in 2008 to enhance transparency and trust in quality assurance of higher education. After the inclusion of the first three quality assurance agencies in the first year, 2009 brought about significant growth of the Register: applications from fourteen agencies were accepted in 2009. By the end of the year, seventeen quality assurance agencies operating in eighteen European countries featured on the Register ([see page 13 and Annex 5](#)).

EQAR's target audiences have been continuously informed through its website, the Guide for Applicants and by participation in relevant conferences and events. Some Bologna Process countries have initiated discussions on how EQAR could serve as a useful reference for their national regulatory framework.

The Report on the First Two Application Rounds, presented by the Register Committee in the autumn of 2009, provided some important reflections after having considered the first fourteen applications for inclusion on the Register. The report gives a comprehensive account of the criteria and decision-making processes used by the Register Committee. The report has enhanced transparency and clarity for EQAR's members, stakeholders and the interested public.

### European Developments in Quality Assurance

The Bologna Process ministerial meeting in Leuven and Louvain-La-Neuve (Belgium) in April 2009 was the year's major event in European higher education policy, where ministers recognised the establishment of EQAR as one

main achievements of the Bologna Process. They also stressed that the emerging "multidimensional transparency tools" needed to relate to the existing Bologna Process instruments, in particular quality assurance mechanisms and recognition, and confirmed that those would remain their priority.

Following up on the 2006 Recommendation of the European Parliament and Council on further European cooperation in quality assurance, the European Commission published a report on progress in quality assurance in September 2009. The report highlights EQAR's role in enhancing transparency

## The Bologna Process



Since 1999, European governments have been working closely together to allow Europe's diverse education systems to articulate better with each other, ultimately aiming at establishing a European Higher Education

Area. The Bologna Process – named after the city of Bologna, where 29 countries signed a declaration marking the beginning of this reform process – nowadays gathers all 46 signatory countries to the Council of Europe's European Cultural Convention. The E4 organisations are consultative members of the Bologna Process.

and trust in quality assurance of higher education, and makes a number of observations on the European dimension of quality assurance and the current infrastructure.

EQAR has responded to the report with a statement (see [Annex 7](#)), setting out how EQAR sees the roles of different European bodies and calling for priority on enhancing transparency of quality assurance in higher education.

With regard to the European dimension of quality assurance, EQAR stressed that the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) provide the basis for a European dimension and noted

that half of the agencies currently registered operate in more than one country, mostly on the basis of voluntary assignment by higher education institutions.

In the context of the E4 Group (comprising of EQAR's Founding Members ENQA, ESU, EUA and EURASHE), first discussions have been held on launching a systematic evaluation of the use and implementation of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), with a view to concluding whether a revision would be needed. EQAR has offered to feed its experience in working with the ESG into that process.

## Background

The concept of a European register of quality assurance agencies was initially welcomed by the ministers of the Bologna Process countries in 2005 at their Bergen summit, where a first proposal was presented in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

At that time, ministers asked the E4 Group (ENQA, ESU, EUA and EURASHE) to investigate further the practicalities of setting up a register of quality assurance agencies, based on the newly adopted Standards and Guidelines, and to present an operational model two years later.

In 2006 the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union expressed their support of the

establishment of a European register in a joint recommendation.

In the spring of 2007, the E4 Group presented an operational model, essentially based on the cooperation of key stakeholders, to the European ministers responsible for higher education, who endorsed the model at their London Summit in May 2007.

On 4 March 2008, concluding its conceptual and preparatory work, the E4 Group founded the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) as a new, independent organisation managed jointly by the E4 partners in cooperation with BUSINESSEUROPE, Education International and European governments.





## External Evaluation of EQAR

At their meeting in Leuven and Louvain-La-Neuve, European ministers of higher education reiterated their call for EQAR to be evaluated externally after having operated for two years:

“We ask the E4 group (ENQA-EUA-EURASHE-ESU) to continue its cooperation in further developing the European dimension of quality assurance and in particular to ensure that the European Quality Assurance Register is evaluated exter-

nally, taking into account the views of the stakeholders.”

(Leuven/Louvain-La-Neuve Communiqué 2009)

EQAR has begun to develop initial plans for the evaluation and to consult with the relevant bodies, in particular the E4 Group. First discussions were held at the General Assembly in Stockholm on 29 September 2009 on the basis of a proposal by the Executive Board. The General Assembly in 2010 is expected to approve the general framework for the evaluation and to agree who will be requested to coordinate it.

**“The Register is open to all quality assurance agencies that commit to the ESG, regardless whether they are organised at national or European level, or based outside Europe.”**

(EQAR Statement on the European Commission Progress Report)

## /// Register of Quality Assurance Agencies

In 2009, EQAR received a total of 12 applications for inclusion on the Register, which were processed in two application rounds. In addition, the Register Committee concluded deliberations on five applications that had been deferred from 2008.

The Register Committee convened twice, on 4/5 April 2009 in Dublin and on 30 September 2009 in Stockholm. As a result

of its deliberations, 14 quality assurance agencies have been admitted to the Register, six in April and eight in October. Each time, a Communiqué from the Chair of the Register Committee was released. Those are published on the EQAR website<sup>1</sup>.

### Applications for Inclusion and Admissions to the Register in 2009

	postponed from 2008	2009 spring	2009 autumn	2009 total
Applications	5	4	8	17
- accepted	4	3	7	14
- rejected	1			1
- withdrawn		1		1

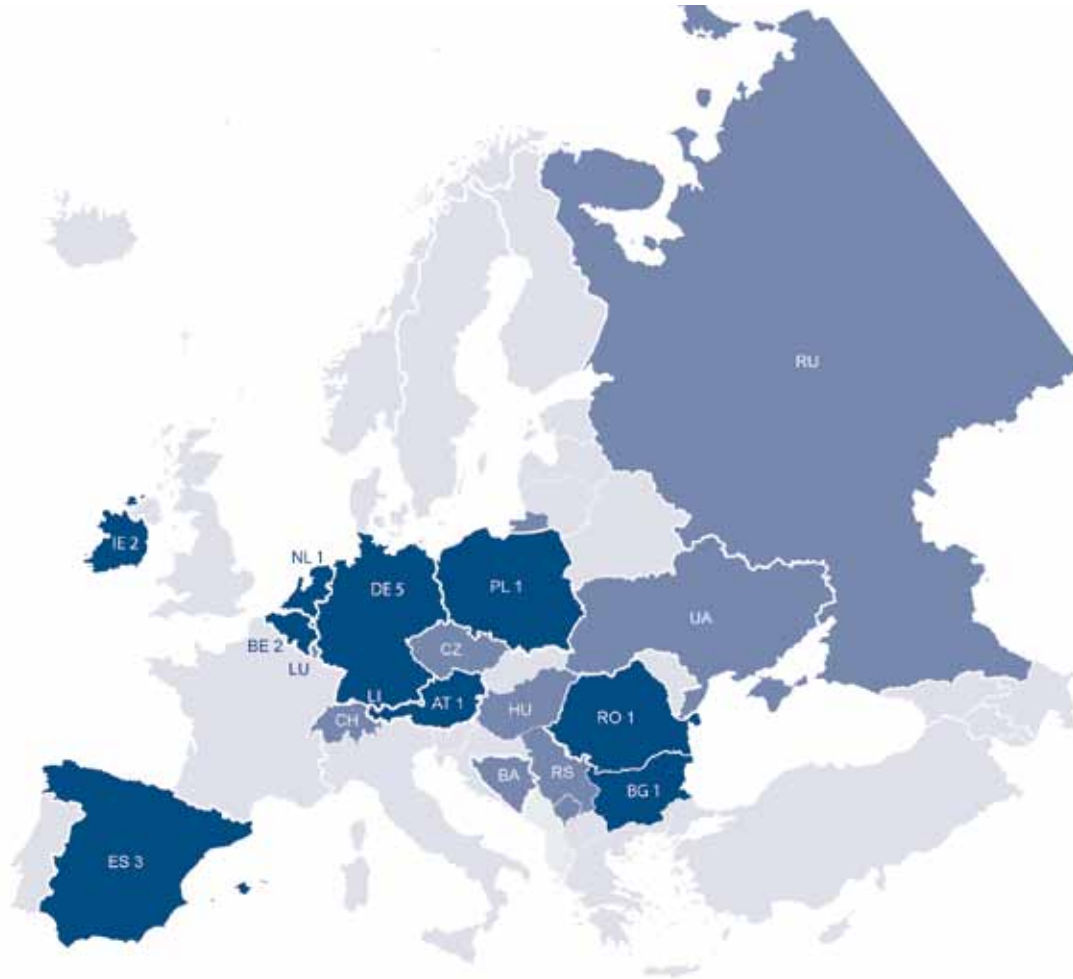
Please note:

/ 5 applications were postponed in 2008. In 2009, the Register Committee considered additional representations made by those applicants and finally decided on their applications.

/ 1 application has been postponed to the first Register Committee in 2010, pending further representation by the applicant.

<sup>1</sup> See: [http://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/eqar/official/T\\_090415\\_EQAR\\_CommuniqueRCChair.pdf](http://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/eqar/official/T_090415_EQAR_CommuniqueRCChair.pdf) (15 April 2009) and [http://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/eqar/official/T\\_091007\\_CommuniqueFromTheRCChair.pdf](http://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/eqar/official/T_091007_CommuniqueFromTheRCChair.pdf) (7 October 2009)

## Countries where registered agencies are based and operating – as of 31/12/09



■ Countries where registered agencies are based

■ Registered agencies have also worked with higher education institutions in these countries. The work of quality assurance agencies outside the country they are based in is mostly on the basis of voluntary assignment by higher education institutions; this does not imply any official recognition or endorsement.

## Information Tools for Applicants

Before the first application round in 2008, a Guide for Applicants had been published as a comprehensive information tool, summarising all relevant requirements and criteria for inclusion on the Register and providing further background information.

All information is also available on the EQAR website, alongside a list of frequently asked questions (FAQ). The FAQ have been updated and extended where necessary, taking into consideration comments received from applicants and misunderstandings that were identified.

A minor update of the Guide for Applicants was published in January 2009. After the spring 2009 application round, applicants were asked for their feedback on the Guide for Applicants as to whether it was useful in preparing an application for inclusion on EQAR and whether it contained all necessary information. Taking into consideration the comments received, the Guide for Applicants was revised and published in June 2009.

In November 2009, feedback was elicited from those agencies that had their application decided upon at the September meeting of the Register Committee. The feedback received fed into an update of the Guide for Applications due for publication in January 2010.

In total, 16 (of 21 applicants invited) offered their feedback and overall responded positively to the EQAR Guide for Applicants. Only few matters were found ambiguous or missing, and most applicants were able to acquire all necessary information from the Guide and the website.

In addition, numerous applicants have been in contact with members of the EQAR statutory bodies and the Secretariat, who have provided additional advice where needed.

## Report on the First Two Application Rounds

In August 2009, the Register Committee compiled a comprehensive report on the first two application rounds. In preparing the report, the Register Committee aimed at striking an adequate balance between the need for accountability, the confidentiality guaranteed to applicants and the need to safeguard the Committee's independence.

It outlines the procedures implemented by the Committee to ensure fair and consistent decision-making as well as the general nature of shortcomings that had led to some applications being unsuccessful.

The report clarifies that the decisive criterion for inclusion on EQAR is substantial compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). The founders of EQAR and European governments had agreed on this notion, bearing in mind that the ESG are principles rather than strict norms. When considering an application, the Register Committee therefore takes a holistic view on the applicant's compliance with all standards, rather than to follow a mechanical process.

The Register Committee decides on the basis of an external review conducted outside EQAR's direct control. The reliability and robustness of this review are therefore of crucial importance, and consequently a two-step procedure is applied: first, the Register Committee considers whether the

external review process adheres to some fundamental requirements set out in the Procedures for Applications. Only where those are met, does the Committee proceed to consider the applicant's compliance with the ESG.

The full report is included as Annex 6. It was presented to the EQAR General Assembly and was gladly welcomed by Governmental as well as Stakeholder Members. Subsequently, the report has been edited for publication and been available on the EQAR website since October 2009.

## How the Register is Used

Quality assurance agencies have been using registration on EQAR as an important quality seal in order to demonstrate their legitimacy to higher education institutions and the public.

In debates on the development of external quality assurance systems, European and national policy makers have increasingly referred to EQAR and have suggested how to use the Register as an authoritative list of quality assurance agencies that have complied with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). The following are some examples:

**Austria:** The ministry responsible for higher education published a consultation paper on the future of external quality assurance of higher education in Austria, proposing a merger of the three existing quality assurance agencies. For institutional reviews and audits, the proposal suggests letting higher education institutions choose any agency freely from the Register, provided that the national criteria are taken into account. Programme accreditation, as well as accreditation

decisions, would remain the exclusive responsibility of the Austrian quality assurance agency.

**Denmark:** A bill is currently being presented to the Danish Parliament, which, among other issues, aims to avoid duplication of quality assurance procedures for Erasmus Mundus programmes. Rather than those undergoing quality assurance or accreditation in all participating countries, it is suggested that programmes are only quality as-

## Criteria and application process

Inclusion on EQAR is open to all quality assurance agencies that substantially comply with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG). This has to be confirmed through an external review by a team of independent experts.

The Register Committee makes its decision based on the external review report, the applicant's self-evaluation report and further documentation where appropriate. Rejected applicants have the possibility to file an appeal on procedural grounds or in case of perversity of judgement.

Further information on the application process and requirements for the external review process is available from the EQAR website and in the Guide for Applicants.

sured/accredited by one quality assurance agency working in line with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). This agency would have to be listed on EQAR.

**Germany:** The German Accreditation Council recently amended his regulations for accreditation of joint programmes. The Council can, under certain circumstances, accept accreditation decisions made by foreign agencies, which are not regularly recognised by the Accreditation Council but are listed on the Register.

**Liechtenstein:** In a new law on higher education, regular accreditation of the higher education institution's quality management will be made mandatory. As a small country, Liechtenstein has no own quality assurance agency, and does not envisage establishing one. Rather, the government intends to license foreign quality assurance agencies based on whether they are registered with EQAR.

**Romania:** The Romanian law on higher education quality assurance obliges the national quality assurance agency (ARACIS, admitted to the register in October 2009) to seek registration on EQAR. The law further stipulates that Romanian higher education institutions – once they have been initially accredited nationally – may use any agency registered on EQAR to fulfil their obligation of being regularly externally evaluated.

## European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)

The ESG were adopted by European ministers of higher education in 2005 as a set of common principles and reference points for internal and external quality assurance of higher education. The ESG comprise three chapters addressing:

1. Internal quality assurance
2. External quality assurance (i.e. aspects of the process)
3. External quality assurance agencies (i.e. the organisation as such)

The latter two are directly relevant for inclusion on EQAR.

The concept of “substantial compliance” underpins the understanding that the ESG are not a checklist, but a set of agreed principles and reference points for quality assurance. There are different ways in which an agency can adhere to the various principles. The judgement as to whether an agency complies substantially with the ESG is therefore not a mechanical process, but each case is considered holistically.

**“With IUQB and HETAC  
now on the EQAR register,  
students can be assured  
that quality issues can  
be dealt with within the  
individual institutions.  
They can also expect a  
quality education.”**

[Peter Mannion, President of the Union of Students in Ireland]



## /// Communication and Public Relations

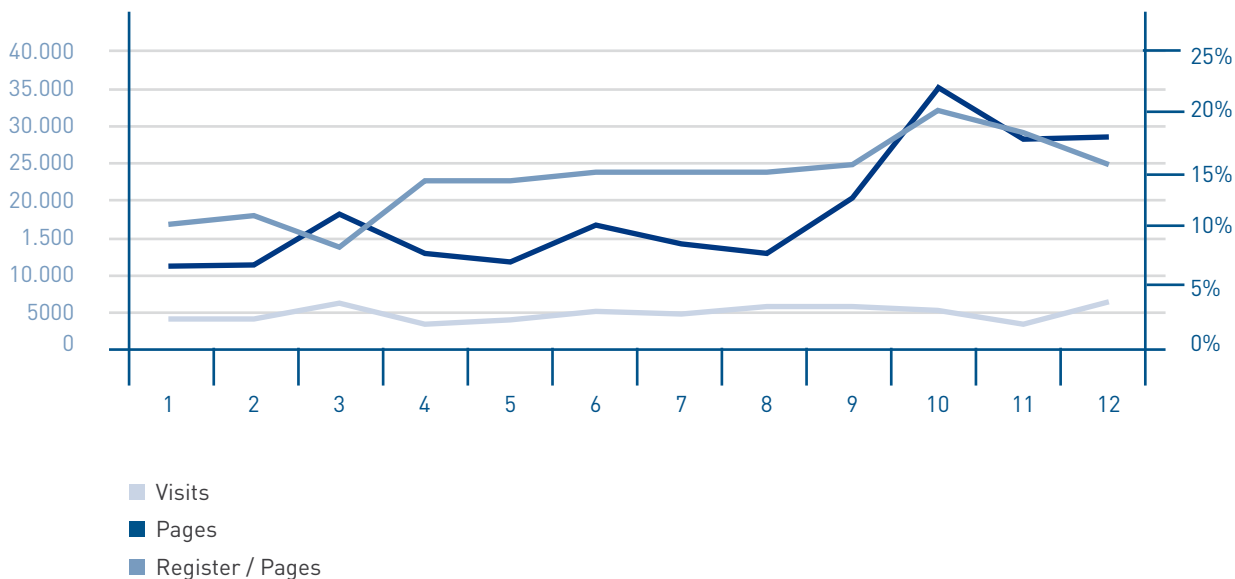
### Website

The website has served as EQAR's main communication tool. News items, such as communications or press releases from EQAR, have been added regularly. Where needed, the specific sites for each target group have been updated or refined. The general structure and information of the website have been updated when necessary, though not fundamentally changed or restructured. We plan to reflect on the website's overall fitness for purpose in the context of the external evaluation of EQAR.

The EQAR website has attracted an increasing number of visitors throughout the year, with ca. 5 000 visits per month in

the second half of 2009 (compared to ca. 2 500 – 3 500 visits per month in 2008). This shows that, in addition to the impact of the increase in registered agencies, various measures taken by EQAR and its members to promote the organisation further among the relevant higher education stakeholders have been successful.

The information which agencies comply substantially with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) – the information EQAR first and foremost set out to provide – has become the focus of attention: The website statistics also show a clear increase in the ratio of visits of the actual register to all pages visited, from about 10% in January to almost 20% in the last quarter.



## Publications

In April, EQAR published its Annual Report 2008, which was produced just in time for the Bologna Process ministerial conference in Leuven/Louvain-La-Neuve. Each member of EQAR, as well as national affiliates of EQAR's stakeholder members and other partner organisations, received a copy of the Annual Report.

The EQAR leaflet, which gives basic information on EQAR's mission and functioning, has proven a successful communication tool and is being used to provide easy understandable information on EQAR to larger audiences.



## Representation and Relation with Partners

EQAR was represented in all major European events concerning quality assurance in higher education, by members of its statutory bodies or the Secretariat. These have been used to promote EQAR's work and provide information to potential applicants and users.

At the UNESCO World Conference of Higher Education (July 2009, Paris) EQAR was present with an information stand in collaboration with EUA and ENQA. This was a good opportunity to present the Register to European as well as non-European governments and stakeholders.



For the European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF, November 2009, Copenhagen) EQAR organised a workshop session in collaboration with the Swiss Office for Vocational Training and ACQUIN, a quality assurance agency registered with EQAR. The workshop served as a platform for participants to reflect on EQAR's work thus far, discuss future needs of EQAR's users and exchange ideas how to meet these demands.

Targeting its Brussels-based partners, EQAR organised a New Year and Office Opening Reception on 16 February 2009 for approximately 35 representatives of partner organisations from the higher education sector and beyond.

In addition, EQAR welcomed various visitors to its premises, including representatives of potential applicants, researchers with an interest in the Bologna Process and a high-level delegation from the Thai ministry of higher education.

EQAR has continuously ensured accountability to its two major constituencies, the E4 organisations as well as the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG). The EQAR Secretariat has regularly reported at the E4 Group meetings. The BFUG has received regular updates on EQAR's work for information at its meetings. Representatives of EQAR have always been present to answer any questions.

The research consortium (CHEPS, INCHER, ECOTEC) commissioned by the European Commission on behalf of the BFUG with the independent assessment of the Bologna Process has interviewed EQAR as part of its research. EQAR participated in the testing seminar and offered its observations on the draft report concerning those matters where EQAR was concerned.

## Media coverage

EQAR informed the press after each application round on the newly admitted agencies. As compared to the time when EQAR was founded, in 2009 interest has come mostly from specialised media covering the sector, rather than from big mainstream media.

During the year EQAR has been referred to occasionally in national media reporting on the inclusion of quality assurance agencies on the European Register, including the following more notable references:

/ Deutsche Universitätszeitung (DUZ, leading German monthly magazine for the higher education sector)

/ Corporación Radiotelevisión Española (RTVE, Spanish public broadcasting)

/ Dnevnik (Slovene daily)

/ University World News (global higher education news site)

## /// Organisation and Finances

### Development of EQAR's Membership

During the past year, two countries joined EQAR as Governmental Members: Slovenia in March 2009 and Switzerland in May 2009, bringing the number of Governmental Members up to 26, of the 46 Bologna Process countries eligible for membership.

The full list of EQAR members is available as [Annex 3](#).

### Statutory Bodies

Following the end of her mandate in the European Students' Union's (ESU), Anne Mikkola resigned from her position of Vice-President of the Executive Board in March 2009. The General Assembly by-elected Bruno Carapinha, former member of ESU's Executive Committee, to the open position. He took over as President of the Executive Board in April 2009.

Eric Froment resigned from his position as Register Committee member in July 2009, after having been appointed Chair of the Steering Committee of the European University Association's (EUA) Institutional Evaluation Programme. EUA nominated Júlio Pedrosa, former Portuguese minister of higher education, to fill the vacant seat. His nomination was approved by the General Assembly in September 2009.

### Office relocation

Owing to a restructuring of the West Midlands in Europe offices, where EQAR had been based since December 2008, EQAR moved to a new office in November 2009.

The new premises on Oudergemselaan/Avenue d'Auderghem 36 – literally a few doors away from the previous location – are shared with the Central European Law Office (CELO) as well as the law firms Wardyński & Partners (Poland), Čechová & Partners (Slovakia) and Brick Court Chambers (UK).



## Staff

To complete its Secretariat, EQAR opened a position as Executive Assistant, working on a part-time basis, in addition to the Acting Director (full-time). Annelies Traas joined EQAR as Executive Assistant on 9 June 2009 and the Secretariat now comprises 1,5 FTE staff, as foreseen in the E4 Group's model submitted to European governments.

## Accounts 2009

EQAR relies on a diversified funding base, including annual contributions from its members (governments and European stakeholder organisations), application and listing fees paid by quality assurance agencies, as well as start-up funding provided by the European Commission. In 2009, EQAR has established special reserves for extraordinary expenditure foreseen, including the external evaluation.

Since the audit and final approval were not completed when this report has been produced, the following tables present a preliminary, unaudited version of the annual accounts 2009. The final accounts will be made available on the EQAR website when audited and approved by members.



Accounts 2009 (preliminary and unaudited as of 19 February 2010)

Balance Sheet (in EUR)			
Assets		Liabilities	
Fixed assets	147,66	Own funds	81 895,05
Liquid assets	175 397,49	Net assets	60 647,68
Receivables up to 1 year	101 617,87	Result per 31/12/09	21 246,37
Cash	73 779,62	Provisions	80 000,00
Income receivable and prepaid expenses	1 255,00	Paybles	14 905,10
		Paybles up to 1 year	14 905,10
<b>Total</b>	<b>176 800,15</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>176 800,15</b>

## Profit and Loss Account (in EUR)

Revenue		Expenditure	
Membership fees	174 500,00	Travel and subsistence	57 187,85
Application/listing fees	19 316,62	Administration (office, publications etc.)	44 538,51
European Commission grant	97 998,44	Staff	87 061,14
Other income	14 628,95	Allocation of provisions	80 000,00
		Other costs	16 410,14
<b>Total</b>	<b>306 444,01</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>285 197,64</b>
<b>Result (surplus)</b>	<b>21 246,37</b>		

## /// Outlook 2010

After a successful first “complete” year in which EQAR has been operating as an independent organisation, EQAR will embark on 2010 as a consolidated organisation.

The coming year will bring about various important challenges for EQAR. The current terms of both the Executive Board and the Register Committee will come to an end. While in both bodies a number of members will continue to serve for a second mandate, there will also be motivated new faces joining EQAR.

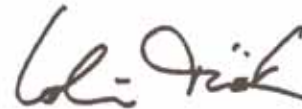
To make this handover phase as smooth as possible and, more importantly, to create an opportunity for informal discussion involving all those who have committed to serving voluntarily on EQAR’s bodies, a first Joint Informal Meeting will be organised in 2010, bringing together all those engaged on EQAR’s statutory bodies.

Secondly, the external evaluation of EQAR, which has been called for by ministers, will commence in 2010. First discus-

sions were already held at the autumn General Assembly in 2009, and these will be continued with a view to agreeing a framework for the evaluation.

In the context of the related self-evaluation exercise EQAR will also be looking more comprehensively at how the Register is currently used, how the information offered might be improved and which expectations both users and registered agencies have.

I am looking forward to another exciting year and to continued excellent collaboration with everybody engaged inside EQAR, as well as with all members and external partners!



Colin Tück  
Director  
January 2010





### 1. Mission and Values

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

EQAR seeks to provide clear 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 manages a register of quality assurance agencies operating in Europe that substantially comply with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG).**

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

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

(adopted by the EQAR General Assembly on 25 June 2008 in Sarajevo)

## 2. Overview of EQAR's structure

The founding of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) as a new, independent international non-profit association in March 2008 concluded a long phase of conceptual and preparatory work by the E4 Group, consisting of ENQA, ESU, EUA and EURASHE.

The E4 Group drew up an operational model for a European register of quality assurance agencies in higher education in the run-up to the Bologna Process follow-up conference held in May 2007 in London. There, the ministers responsible for higher education in the 46 Bologna Process countries mandated the E4 organisations to set up a European register of quality assurance agencies.

EQAR's structure was developed based on the premise that the key stakeholders in higher education jointly bear the main responsibility to establish EQAR and to ensure its operation, as reflected in the mandate given to the E4 Group by ministers. At the same time, it was recognised that European governments bear the responsibility for Europe's higher education systems as a whole and thus needed to be involved in order to enhance overall accountability.

The E4 Group developed a structure featuring differentiated roles for governments and stakeholders, and several checks and balances (see Figure below). The BFUG was informed about how European governments could get

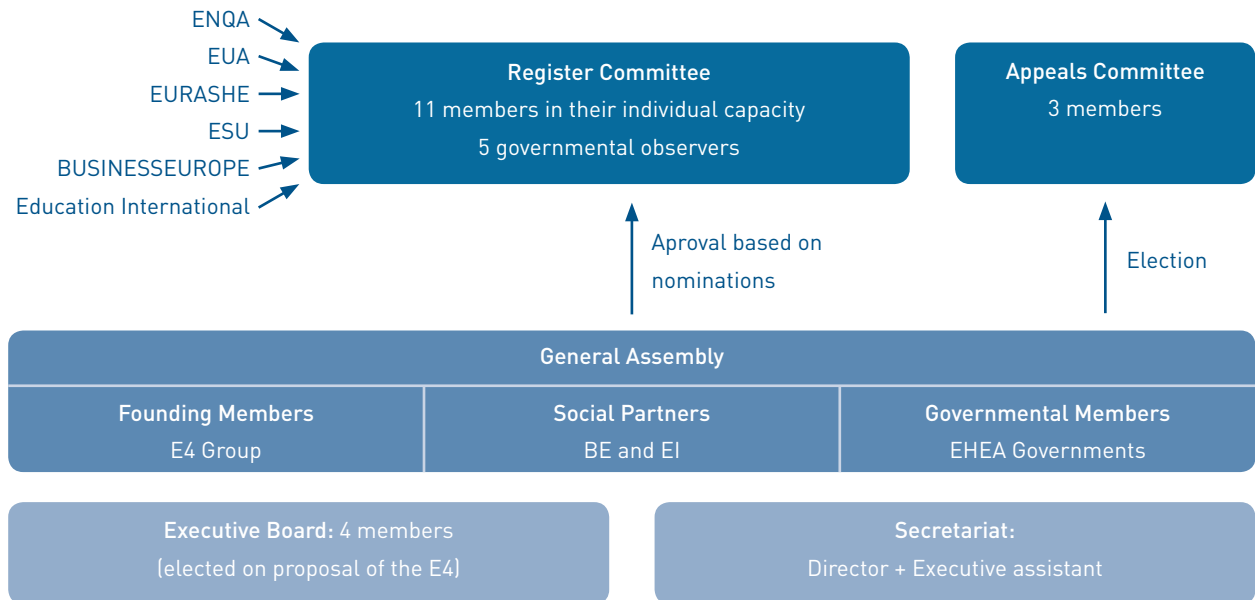


Figure: Structure of EQAR aisbl/ivzw

involved in the governance of the new EQAR association and all Bologna Process countries were formally invited to become Governmental Members of the new association right from the start.

All members together form the **General Assembly** of the association. It decides on general matters of the association, such as the annual budget and the composition of the Executive Board. A special voting scheme ensures that governments and stakeholders cannot outvote each other.

The **Executive Board** includes one representative from each Founding Member. The members take turns in assuming the posts of President, Treasurer and two Vice-Presidents. The Executive Board is in charge of ensuring the smooth day-to-day operation of EQAR. With the support of the Secretariat, the Board assumes responsibility for all administrative matters of the association.

The decision making on applications for inclusion on the register lies in the hands of the **Register Committee**. It is a dedicated body for this task, comprising of a chairperson and

ten members with ample experience in quality assurance of higher education. The members are nominated by the Non-Governmental Members, i.e. ENQA, ESU, EUA, EURASHE (2 each), BUSINESSEUROPE and Education International (1 each). The first Chairperson was appointed by the E4 organisations jointly and in the future s/he will be by-elected by the Register Committee. The Committee's proceedings are observed by representatives of five European governments, nominated by the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG).

Possible appeals against a decision of the Register Committee will be considered and decided by the **Appeals Committee**, comprising of 3 members and 3 deputies.

The partnership of governments and stakeholders in EQAR's structure represents a new development in the Bologna Process. While overall accountability to governments is ensured, the main responsibility for the management and development of the organisation is borne by stakeholders. The partnership ensures the involvement of governments, multi-national organisations and stakeholders, in order to cater for optimal accountability and broad ownership.

## Timeline:

### establishment of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)

May 2005	Bergen Summit: Bologna Process ministers welcome the idea of a European register of quality assurance agencies
Feb 2006	Joint Recommendation of the European Parliament and Council backs the establishment of a register
Apr 2007	E4 Group presents an operational model for a register to European ministers of higher education
May 2007	London Summit: ministers endorse the operational model and ask the E4 Group to establish EQAR
Jan 2008	Nomination of the first Register Committee
Mar 2008	Founding of EQAR: a new, independent organisation is born, nineteen Bologna governments join the new association
Aug 2008	EQAR officially invites quality assurance agencies to apply for inclusion on the register
Dec 2008	First quality assurance agencies are included on the European register of quality assurance agencies
Apr & Oct 2009	Further quality assurance agencies admitted to the Register
Sep 2009	Report on the First Two Application Rounds presented by the Register Committee
Nov 2009	Stakeholder members (E4, BE, EI) are invited to make nominations for the 2nd Register Committee and Executive Board, taking office in 2010

### 3. List of EQAR members as of 31/12/09

#### Founding Members

- / ENQA, European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
- / ESU, European Students' Union (formerly ESIB)
- / EUA, European University Association
- / EURASHE, European Association of Institutions in Higher Education

#### Social Partner Members

- / BUSINESSEUROPE
- / Education International

#### Governmental Members

- / Armenia  
Ministry of Education and Science
- / Austria  
Federal Ministry of Science and Research
- / Belgium (Flemish community)  
Flemish Department of Education and Training
- / Belgium (French-speaking community)  
Direction générale de l'Enseignement non obligatoire et de la Recherche scientifique
- / Bosnia and Herzegovina  
Ministry of Civil Affairs
- / Bulgaria  
Ministry of Education and Science
- / Cyprus  
Ministry of Education and Culture
- / Denmark

- Danish University and Property Agency / Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation
- / Estonia  
Ministry of Education and Research
- / France  
Ministry of Higher Education and Research
- / Georgia  
Ministry of Education and Science
- / Germany  
Federal Ministry of Education and Research / Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany
- / Hungary  
Ministry of Education and Culture
- / Ireland  
Department of Education and Science
- / Liechtenstein  
Office of Education
- / Luxembourg  
Ministry of Culture, Higher Education and Research
- / Malta  
Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment
- / the Netherlands  
Ministry of Education, Culture and Science
- / Norway  
Ministry of Education and Research
- / Poland  
Ministry of Science and Higher Education
- / Portugal  
Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education
- / Romania  
Ministry of Education, Research and Youth
- / Slovenia (joined in 2009)

Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Technology  
/ Spain  
Ministry of Education and Science  
/ Switzerland (joined in 2009)  
State Secretariat for Education and Research  
/ Ukraine  
Ministry of Education and Science

## 4. Composition of EQAR bodies

### Register Committee

#### Chair:

/ Bryan McMahon (Dublin, Ireland)  
Judge of the High Court of Ireland

#### Vice-Chair:

/ Lucien Bollaert (Kortrijk, Belgium)  
Member of the Executive Board, Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO)

#### Members:

/ Christoph Anz (München, Germany)  
Head of Education Policy Unit, BMW Group

/ Gintautas Bražiūnas (Vilnius, Lithuania)  
Managing Director, Vilnius College of Higher Education

/ Éric Froment (Lyon, France) – until July 2009  
Professor at University of Lyon (Lumière-Lyon 2)

/ Henrik Toft Jensen (Roskilde, Denmark)  
Former rector, Roskilde University

/ Dáire Keogh (Dublin, Ireland)  
Vice-President, Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT)

/ Dorte Kristoffersen (Hong Kong)  
Deputy Executive Director, Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications

/ Júlio Pedrosa (Aveiro, Portugal) – since 29 September 2009  
Senior Researcher, Ciceco – Centre for Research in Ceramics and Composite Materials

/ Mala Singh (Milton Keynes, United Kingdom)  
Professor of International Higher Education Policy, Centre for Higher Education Research and Information, Open University

/ Tanel Sits (Tallinn, Estonia)  
Educational Policy Officer, Federation of Estonian Student Unions (EÜL)

/ Regina Weber (Berlin, Germany)  
Former member of the Executive Board of the National Union of Students in Germany (fzs)

#### Observers:

/ Austria  
/ Denmark  
/ Estonia  
/ Ireland  
/ Portugal

## Executive Board

#### President:

/ Bruno Carapinha (Lisbon, Portugal)  
Former member of the Executive Committee, European Students' Union (ESU)  
(since April 2009)

#### Vice-Presidents:

/ Anne Mikkola (Helsinki, Finland)  
Former member of the Bologna Process Committee, European Students' Union (ESU)  
(until March 2009)

/ Andreas Orphanides (Nicosia, Cyprus)  
Vice-President, European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE)

/ Emmi Helle (Helsinki, Finland)  
Secretary General, European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)  
(Treasurer until March 2009)

#### Treasurer:

/ Lesley Wilson (Brussels, Belgium)  
Secretary General, European University Association (EUA)  
(President until March 2009)



#### Ex-officio:

/ Bryan McMahon (Dublin, Ireland)  
Chair of the EQAR Register Committee

## Appeals Committee

#### Chair:

/ Jürgen Kohler (Greifswald, Germany)  
Former Chair of the German Accreditation Council

#### Members:

/ Ossi V. Lindqvist (Kuopio, Finland)  
Former chair of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC)

/ Stephan Neetens (Brussels, Belgium)  
Lawyer, Brussels Office of DLA Piper

#### Deputy chair:

/ Thierry Malan (Paris, France)  
Former General Inspector, Inspectorate for Education and Research

#### Deputy members:

/ Geri Bonhof (Utrecht, the Netherlands)  
President of the Executive Board, Hogeschool Utrecht – University of Applied Sciences

/ Inge Jonsson (Stockholm, Sweden)  
Former Rector of Stockholm University

## Secretariat

#### Acting Director:

/ Colin Tück  
(appointed Director as from 1/1/2010)

#### Executive Assistant:

/ Annelies Traas  
(since June 2009)

## 5. Registered Quality Assurance Agencies – as of 31 December 2009 –

The following agencies were included on the register as of 31/12/2009. Agencies are included for five years counting from the date of their external review, the duration of inclusion is indicated in the table for each agency.

Further information on these agencies and the external review reports on which EQAR's decision are based can be obtained from:

<http://www.eqar.eu/register.html>

Name:	Included since:	Inclusion until:
ACQUIN – Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute (Germany)	15/4/2009	31/5/2011
AGAE – Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Research of Andalucía	7/10/2009	31/1/2014
AHPGS – Accreditation Agency for Study Programmes in Health and Social Sciences AHPGS	7/10/2009	31/3/2014
ANECA – National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain	5/12/2008	30/6/2012
AQA – Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance	7/10/2009	30/11/2012
AQU – Agency for Quality Assurance in the Catalan University System	5/12/2008	31/8/2012

ARACIS – Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education	7/10/2009	31/3/2014
ASIIN – Akkreditierungsagentur für Studiengänge der Ingenieurwissenschaften, der Informatik, der Mathematik und der Naturwissenschaften (Germany)	15/4/2009	31/5/2011
FIBAA – Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation (Germany)	15/4/2009	29/2/2012
HETAC – Higher Education and Training Awards Council (Ireland)	7/10/2009	30/9/2011
IUQB – Irish Universities Quality Board	7/10/2009	30/9/2013
NEAA – National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (Bulgaria)	7/10/2009	31/7/2013
NVAO – Accreditation Organization of The Netherlands and Flanders	5/12/2008	30/9/2012
PKA – State Accreditation Commission (Poland)	15/4/2009	31/12/2013
VLHORA – Flemish Council of University Colleges (Belgium)	15/4/2009	31/10/2013
VLIR-QAU – Flemish Interuniversity Council, Quality Assurance Unit (Belgium)	7/10/2009	31/5/2014
ZEVA – Central Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (Germany)	15/4/2009	31/5/2011

## 6. Report on the First Two Application Rounds (7 October 2009)

This report by the Register Committee gives an account of the first two rounds of applications. It highlights some observations by the Register Committee and addresses the general nature of some difficulties and challenges it has encountered.

It was presented by the Register Committee to the 3rd EQAR General Assembly on 29 September 2009 in Stockholm and has subsequently been edited for publication. The overview of applications received (section 4) has been updated in the light of the third application round and the decisions made by the Register Committee on 30 September 2009.

### 6.1. Background and introduction

The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) was founded in March 2008 by the E4 Group (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, ENQA; European Students' Union, ESU; European University Association, EUA and European Association of Institutions in Higher Education, EURASHE) following the mandate received from European ministers of higher education at their London summit in May 2007.

The decision-making on applications for inclusion on the Register was entrusted to the Register Committee, an independent body comprising of quality assurance experts who have been nominated by the E4 organisations, BUSINESSEUROPE and Education International, and who serve in their personal capacity.

EQAR was established to operate and manage the Register as a "white list" of quality assurance agencies that have proven, through an external review, their substantial compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG). Its objective is limited to identifying applicants who comply substantially with the ESG and does not extend to supporting agencies in achieving substantial compliance.

Decisions made by the Register Committee are based on the factors prevailing when an application is made (more precisely, when the external review was undertaken), and not on anticipated or planned future developments. As there is no possibility for an applicant's "conditional inclusion", the Register Committee must have full confidence in an agency's substantial compliance with the ESG when accepting it on the Register.

Inclusion on EQAR is voluntary for quality assurance agencies. When developing the Procedures for Applications (see below), it was decided that, for now, EQAR would guarantee confidentiality to unsuccessful applicants. Applicants may, themselves, choose to waive this confidentiality at their discretion.

This also avoids misleading information: a comparably new agency that is developing its processes and that is not (yet) substantially compliant with the ESG might be branded as "rejected by EQAR", while a clearly dubious establishment or "accreditation mill" would be better off not applying for inclusion at all.

Furthermore, EQAR must be mindful of the legal consequences that might follow the publication of information on rejected applications.

In preparing this report, the Register Committee aimed at striking an adequate balance between the need for accountability, the confidentiality guaranteed to applicants and the need to safeguard the Committee's independence.

## 6.2. Criteria for inclusion on the Register

### a) European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG)

The Statutes stipulate that **substantial compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)** is the decisive requirement for inclusion on the Register.

In order to demonstrate their substantial compliance with the ESG, applicants are required to undergo an external review of their activities prior to making an application for inclusion on the Register. This external review is organised by a coordinating organisation, or review coordinator, which can be freely chosen by the applicant provided that it is an organisation with the necessary professional capacity and fully independent of the applicant. The review coordinator appoints a review panel of independent experts, who set out their findings in an external review report.

### b) Procedures for Applications and requirements for external reviews

The Procedures for Applications define the application process in detail. They serve as a tool for the Register Committee, stipulating reliable and consistent procedures which allow the Register Committee to identify applicants who comply substantially with the ESG.

These Procedures have been adopted by the Register Com-

mittee in consultation with the General Assembly. The Register Committee prepared draft Procedures in May 2008 and the General Assembly was consulted at its meeting on 25 June 2008 in Sarajevo. Following consideration of the comments and proposals made by the General Assembly, the Register Committee adopted the Procedures on 6 August 2008.

The Register Committee followed some guiding principles when drafting the Procedures for Applications: clarity and transparency of the application process to applicants; fairness and consistency of the decision-making, including that each application is considered on its own merits; ensuring that decisions are made on clear grounds, of which applicants are informed.

The Procedures for Applications stipulate **requirements for external reviews** of quality assurance agencies, which form the basis of the Register Committee's judgement on compliance with the ESG. Given that the Register Committee has to decide on the basis of an external review that has been conducted outside of EQAR's direct control, these requirements are crucial to ensure that decisions are made on a reliable and consistent basis. The requirements address, inter alia, the independence of the review process, the involvement of different stakeholder perspectives in the review panel, and the reference of the review process to the ESG.

### c) Two-step procedure

Given that EQAR is not involved in the planning of external reviews and does not require any prior approval of planned reviews by itself, the robustness of an external review can only be validated when an application is made for inclusion on the Register.

The decision-making on applications follows a two-step procedure:

- / examination of an application's adherence to the Procedures for Applications, in particular regarding the external review process

- / consideration of the applicant's substantial compliance with the ESG

Only if all requirements for external reviews as set out in the Procedures are met, does the Register Committee go on to consider the applicant's substantial compliance with the ESG. Where the requirements of the Procedures are not fulfilled, the external review process is not considered to constitute a reliable basis for EQAR's decision-making. The application is rejected, without, however, making any judgement on the applicant's compliance with the ESG.

The Register Committee has had to clarify that the requirements set out in the Procedures for Applications are obligatory in all respects. This does not seem to have been entirely clear in the beginning. Even though an individual case might justify making an exception (e.g. for legacy reviews carried out before EQAR's existence), the Register Committee considered it necessary to draw a clear line in the interest of not jeopardising the integrity of its decisions. If exceptions had been made in the beginning it would be very difficult to require stricter adherence to the Procedures at a later stage.

d) Inclusion on EQAR and membership of ENQA

Most European quality assurance agencies interested in inclusion on EQAR are also members of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), or are

planning to join ENQA.

In the discussions leading to the establishment of EQAR, it was agreed among the E4 partners that full membership of ENQA would normally constitute satisfactory evidence of substantial compliance with the ESG, since ENQA requires its full members to provide evidence through an external review report that they comply substantially with the ESG.

Membership of ENQA is thus an important piece of information in the Register Committee's decision-making: the knowledge that ENQA's bodies have already scrutinised the same external review and concluded that the applicant substantially complied with the ESG establishes initial confidence. However, given that EQAR makes a clear and firm statement on an agency's compliance with the ESG, the reliability of which EQAR must itself be able to defend, if necessary, there is no "automatic admission" to the Register. The Register Committee considers every case individually and on its own merits in order to gain full confidence that each admitted agency complies substantially with the ESG.

### 6.3. Guide for Applicants

A Guide for Applicants has been produced as a practical information document. It describes the Procedures for Applications in plain, non-legal language and supplements them with additional explanations and information.

The first edition of the Guide was published together with the adopted Procedures on 8 August 2008. A minor update was published on 15 January 2009. After the second round of applications, applicants were asked whether the Guide

was useful and presented all the necessary information in an unambiguous way. On the basis of the applicants' (overall positive) feedback and the experience of Register Committee members from the first two rounds of applications, a revised Guide for Applicants was published on 11 June 2009. The results of the feedback survey are presented in Annex 1.

Since August 2008, EQAR has been accepting applications from quality assurance agencies for inclusion on the Register. Applications have been dealt with in three rounds, with deadlines on 3 October 2008, 9 February 2009 and 26 July 2009, respectively. The following table gives a statistical overview:

#### 6.4. Overview of applications received

	1st round	2nd round	3rd round	total
Applications	10	4	8	22
- accepted	7	3	7	17
- rejected	1	0	n / a	1
- withdrawn	2	1	n / a	3
- pending	0	0	1	1
EHEA / outside <sup>a</sup>	9 / 1	4 / 0	8 / 0	21 / 1
General / sectoral <sup>b</sup>	8 / 2	4 / 0	7 / 1	19 / 3
Operating in one / multiple countries	5 / 5	3 / 1	4 / 4	12 / 10

NB: "0" = there are no applications in the respective category, "n/a" = there cannot be any (example: an application from the 2nd round could not be rejected before the RC's 30/9/09 meeting).

a: Refers to whether the applicant has its registered office within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) or outside

b: "Sectoral" refers to applicants working in a limited number of professional sectors/academic disciplines, "General" refers to applicants working across all sectors/disciplines.

## 6.5. The application process

The Register Committee convenes twice a year to consider applications. A deadline is published for each of these two rounds, usually about 2 months before the Register Committee's meeting.

### a) Rapporteurs

Each application is assigned two rapporteurs who have the responsibility of analysing the documentation and preparing recommendations which serve as the basis for deliberations at the Committee's meeting. Steps are taken to ensure that no rapporteur has a conflict of interest with an assigned application and that the two rapporteurs are not persons nominated by the same organisation.

The teams of rapporteurs analyse the application documents and set out their analysis on an Internal Assessment Sheet, which will also outline any potential problems identified. In some cases, rapporteurs refer a request for further information or clarification to applicants before the Register Committee's meeting. This happens where an issue can reasonably be answered within approximately 2 weeks.

For the third round of applications, an additional Register Committee member was assigned to each application as 3rd rapporteur to comment on the two main rapporteurs' analysis. This was intended to provide a third perspective for the Register Committee's deliberations and helps to broaden their basis, and further increase the soundness and consistency of decision-making.

### b) Decision-making on applications

When considering an application, the Register Committee

reaches one of the following three conclusions:

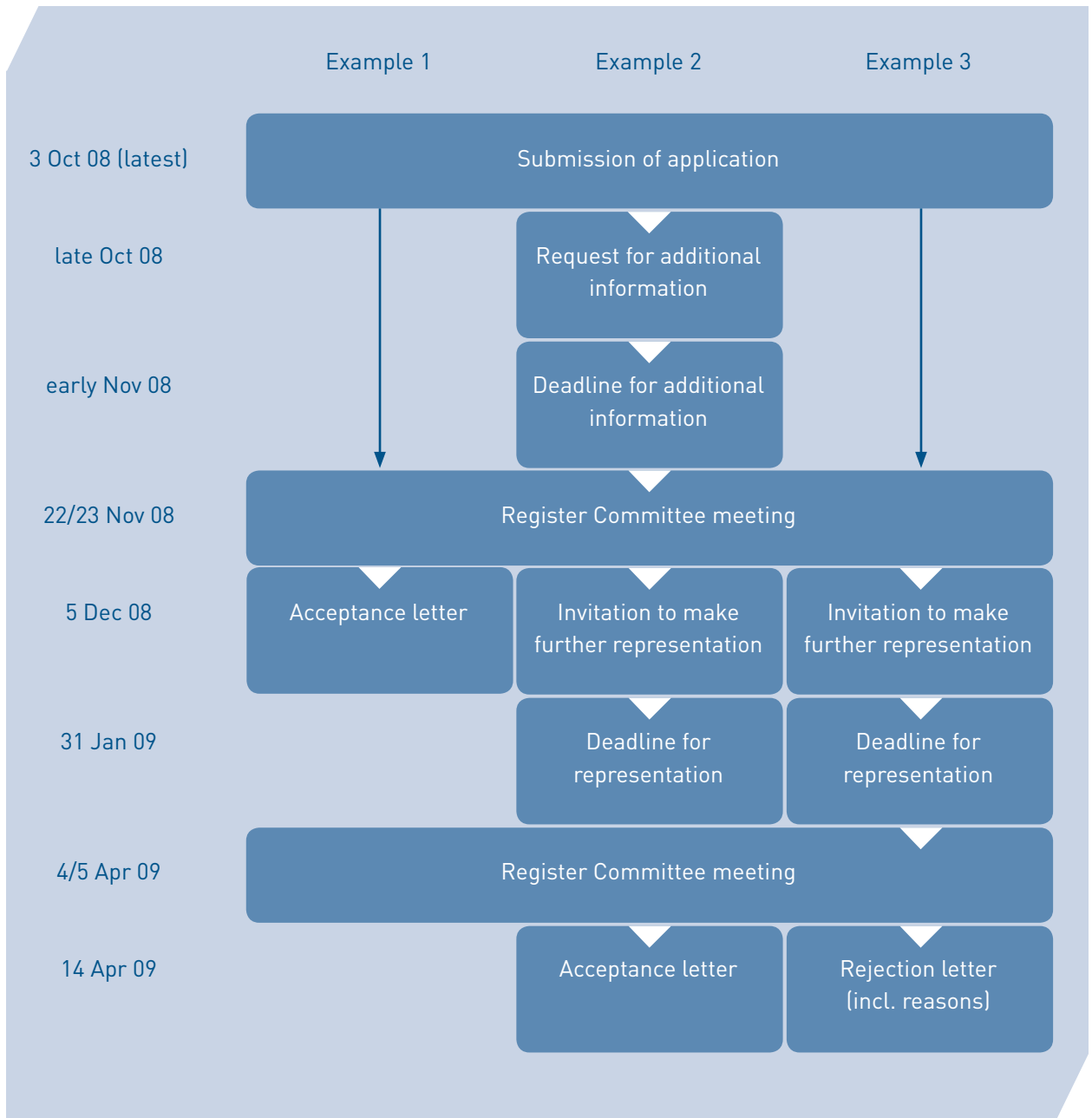
1. The application is accepted: The applicant is included on the Register for five years from the date of the external review report.
2. The Register Committee considers rejecting the application: The applicant is informed of the grounds for possible rejection and invited to make additional representation on the matters identified by the Register Committee. The application remains pending until the next meeting of the Register Committee, where it may be either rejected or accepted, taking into account the additional representation made.
3. The Committee requests further information from the applicant: The application remains pending until the following meeting.

However, the applicant can also withdraw the application instead of making additional representation (in case 2) or providing additional information (in case 3), see also Guide for Applicants, section 5.6, page 13.

It has proven helpful to invite applicants to make additional representation where rejection is considered. In some cases, applicants could make representations that added to the required information and helped to fulfil all requirements for inclusion. In other cases, applicants made use of the possibility of withdrawal.

The following tables illustrate typical timelines for applications made in the first round. It is purely indicative and does not refer to any actual applications. The table is not exhaustive and other steps are possible in the application process.





## 6.6. General observations on the applications received

The following outlines some general observations of the Register Committee in considering applications for inclusion on the Register.

### a) Methodology of external review

The idea that quality assurance agencies undergo a periodic external review of their activity is relatively new for the European Higher Education Area. Some external reviews were undertaken exclusively to analyse the level of compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), others focus on the functioning of an agency in accordance with the requirements applicable in the national context. Some reports did not relate to the ESG directly (see 7. below for further details).

The external review reports which the Register Committee has considered so far vary considerably in their scope, detail and readability in addressing the ESG and the terms of reference. Most external review reports considered by the Register Committee provide a clear and comprehensible analysis of the reviewed agency's compliance with the ESG and present a persuasive conclusion, allowing the Register Committee to make a confident decision fairly easily.

A few reports have been found to be too brief or overly simplistic in arriving at the conclusion that an agency complies substantially with the ESG.

Some reports make use of rather creative arguments in concluding that an agency complies with certain standards or consider national legislation in a fairly generous manner as a reason for not fulfilling the ESG.

In some cases, minor questions eventually remained unanswered. This is, however, unavoidable in an arrangement where the Register Committee decides mostly on the basis of an external review and is not supposed to re-do the external panel's work.

### b) Using the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)

The concept of "substantial compliance" with the ESG was agreed on by the E4 Group when preparing an operational model for EQAR before the Bologna Ministerial Conference in London (2007). The concept underpins the understanding that the ESG are not a checklist, but a set of agreed principles and reference points for quality assurance. There are different ways in which an agency can adhere to the various principles, and even if an agency is not complying with every standard to the letter of the law, it may be considered substantially compliant with the ESG as a whole.

The judgement as to whether an agency complies substantially with the ESG is therefore not made in a mechanical process. The Register Committee does not apply any numerical rules, but a holistic view is sought on the application and the external review team's analysis of the applicant's compliance with the different ESG before reaching a comprehensive judgement.

Bearing in mind that the ESG are not a checklist and leave room for discretion of judgement in their interpretation and application, it is natural that different review teams and external review coordinators could put emphasis on different aspects of the ESG and come to judgements which are not entirely consistent across different external reviews.

This underlines the importance of the Register Committee's

deliberations levelling out a range of different interpretations and thus enhancing consistency in applying the ESG. The Register Committee is aware that this requires careful consideration of every case with a view to precedents which might be set. It is probable that the Register Committee might reach a different conclusion from the one reached by the external review panel in some cases.

For virtually all applicants the Register Committee has identified some [areas where substantial compliance with the ESG is less obvious](#) than in others and/or its sustainability is considered fragile. Where such applications are accepted, the Register Committee has flagged these issues for particular attention when the agency subsequently applies for renewal of its inclusion on the Register. These issues have been indicated in the acceptance letters to applicants.

In its work, the Register Committee naturally reflects on how the ESG work in practice as a set of principles guiding the work of quality assurance agencies. Should the competent parties – European ministers of higher education and the E4 Group – at some point decide to revise the ESG, the Register Committee would be glad to offer its feedback on the ESG as appropriate.

#### [c\) Applicability of the ESG to different types of organisations](#)

The Register Committee addressed the general question as to the type of organisation to which the ESG are applicable. The Committee considers the ESG applicable to external quality assurance bodies, that is, organisations whose core activity is to review, evaluate, accredit or audit higher education institutions, organisational units or individual study programmes. The ESG indicate that parts 2 and 3 were written to be applicable to such bodies in the “Introduction to

Parts 1 and 2” (p. 14) as well as in the guidelines to standards 3.1 and 3.3.

If an applicant does not perform (direct) external quality assurance of higher education institutions or programmes, it is normally not considered for inclusion on the Register. Nevertheless, given the complex realities of different systems and the sometimes difficult decision as to whether quality assurance-related functions are direct or situated at meta-level, each individual case is carefully considered on its own merits. If an application is not successful because of the above consideration, this is communicated clearly to the applicant and does not constitute any kind of judgement on the organisation’s activities.

#### [6.7. Specific observations from the applications processed](#)

Of the 13 applications for inclusion that have been processed in the first two application rounds, 9 were accepted by the Register Committee. This reflects the overall high quality of applications received from a number of very motivated quality assurance agencies who demonstrate a clear intent in giving effect to the ESG.

Generally, the applications have demonstrated that the ESG enshrine widely accepted and used principles of good external quality assurance. About four years after their adoption, many quality assurance agencies have aligned their methodology and processes with the ESG and use them as a central reference point in their work. Most agencies are well aware of the areas where compliance with the ESG could be improved and are currently striving to take the necessary steps.

The following describes the nature of problems encountered with unsuccessful applications and also describes where one or more of the included agencies did not fully comply with the criteria.

#### a) Regarding EQAR's Procedures

The Register Committee has received applications where the [composition of the external review panel](#) did not fulfil the requirements of the Procedures for Applications. The Procedures specify that the external review panel shall consist of at least four persons who should "possess sufficient knowledge, experience and expertise to be able to understand, analyse and judge the applicant's activities" (Art. 6 [1]). Its members "shall represent a range of expertise, covering the different perspectives of the key stakeholders and comprising of at least an academic staff member and a student from a higher education institution." (Art. 6 [2])

The Procedures also specify, in Art.7 and Art. 8, that the self-evaluation report "shall reflect on the applicant's compliance with the ESG" and the external review report "shall provide sufficient evidence of the applicant's compliance with the ESG". The Register Committee has concluded that this is not fulfilled where the reports do not actually relate to the ESG. Reports have, however, been accepted if the legacy [reports were aligned to the ESG](#) (by the respective authors) for the purpose of the application for inclusion on the Register.

#### b) Regarding the use of different sections of the ESG

In some external review and self-evaluation reports, the standards of ESG Part 2 were only dealt with under ESG 3.1 without referring to ESG 2.1 to 2.8 individually. This has sometimes rendered the process of identifying evidence for substantial compliance with ESG Part 2 more difficult for the

Register Committee as compared to external review reports that address ESG Part 2 standard-by-standard.

#### Publishing of reports (ESG 2.5)

Not all quality assurance agencies publish full reports of their evaluations, accreditations or audits. Some agencies do not publish information in cases where accreditation is denied. Some agencies publish only summarised reports or reasons on their website. The ESG do, however, not stipulate details as to whether full or summarised reports are required.

#### Report drafting procedures (ESG 2.4, 2.5 and 3.6)

In a few cases, the robustness of report drafting procedures has been a matter of concern for the Register Committee. This related to other bodies possibly exercising undue influence on an expert team's analysis and report.

#### Independence (ESG 3.6)

The structural and operational independence of quality assurance agencies has usually been duly and carefully considered in the external reviews. While most agencies could prove that they are independent from other bodies (ministries, rectors' conferences, students' unions, etc.) in their operation and decision-making, this independence was in some cases considered potentially fragile or ambiguous.

In some cases, the Register Committee had questions regarding the independence of experts/reviewers recruited by quality assurance agencies and the effectiveness of mechanisms to rule out conflicts of interests.

### **Participation of student, professional and international experts (ESG 2.4 and 3.7)**

The participation of students in external quality assurance is an area still under development in some cases. Most agencies involve students in one way or another, but there are different understandings of their role in detail (considered as full and equal partners, as observers or as members with different rights and responsibilities from others).

As far as professional experts (i.e. persons not working in a higher education institution) are concerned the situation is similar, sometimes their participation is even less developed than the participation of students.

Not all quality assurance agencies involve international experts in their expert teams and decision-making bodies. Language barriers are a prominent reason cited for not doing so.

### **Internal quality assurance of quality assurance agencies (ESG 3.8)**

In many cases, internal quality assurance of quality assurance agencies is organised on an informal basis. However, many agencies have begun to develop clearly formalised and structured internal quality assurance systems.

## **6.8. Concluding remarks**

The Register Committee considers it an important development in the European Higher Education Area that there is great interest among quality assurance agencies in being included on the Register. It has been impressed by the overall high quality of applications received.

Due to the improvement-oriented measures taken by quality assurance agencies themselves, it is anticipated that some of the above problems and challenges will be less frequent in the future. It is also expected that problems with the requirements for external reviews from EQAR's Procedures for Applications will diminish now that these are widely known. They can thus be taken into account from the outset when planning external reviews of quality assurance agencies.

The Register Committee sincerely hopes that, for EQAR and for the wider public, this report will be a useful account of its work and the challenges facing it.

## **6.9. References**

Communiqués from the Chair of the Register Committee regarding the inclusion of agencies on the Register

5 December 2008:

[http://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/eqar/official/T\\_081202\\_EQAR\\_StatementRCChair\\_1stApplications.pdf](http://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/eqar/official/T_081202_EQAR_StatementRCChair_1stApplications.pdf)

15 April 2009:

[http://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/eqar/official/T\\_090415\\_EQAR\\_CommuniqueRCChair.pdf](http://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/eqar/official/T_090415_EQAR_CommuniqueRCChair.pdf)

7 October 2009:

[http://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/eqar/official/T\\_091007\\_CommuniqueFromTheRCChair.pdf](http://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/eqar/official/T_091007_CommuniqueFromTheRCChair.pdf)

Guide for Applicants, Version 2.0 of 11 June 2009

[http://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/eqar/information/guide/EQAR\\_GuideForApplicants\\_v2\\_0.pdf](http://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/eqar/information/guide/EQAR_GuideForApplicants_v2_0.pdf)

Statutes of EQAR, as of 4 March 2008

[http://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/eqar/official/EQAR\\_Statutes\\_FINAL\\_v3\\_1\\_EN.pdf](http://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/eqar/official/EQAR_Statutes_FINAL_v3_1_EN.pdf)

Procedures for Applications, as of 6 August 2008

[http://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/eqar/official/RC\\_01\\_1\\_ProceduresForApplications\\_v1\\_0.pdf](http://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/eqar/official/RC_01_1_ProceduresForApplications_v1_0.pdf)

European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG)

<http://www.eqar.eu/application/requirements/european-standards-and-guidelines.html>

## 7. Statement on the European Commission's Report on Progress in Quality Assurance (30 November 2009)

Brussels, 30 November 2009

1. EQAR is pleased that the European Commission's Report on progress in quality assurance of higher educationi recognises EQAR's contribution to increasing transparency and trust in quality assurance of higher education<sup>1</sup> in Europe.
2. EQAR manages a register of credible and legitimate quality assurance agencies that comply substantially with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG). The Register aims to enhance mutual trust as a basis for mutual recognition of quality assurance results and decisions. It aims to reduce opportunities for so-called "accreditation mills", dubious establishments that "accredit" spurious institutions to give them false credibility.

### The European dimension in quality assurance

3. The ESG are the basis for a genuine European dimension in quality assurance. They enshrine shared European values and principles for internal and external quality assurance, including the cooperation between the relevant stakeholders, well-defined and transparent criteria and procedures as well as independence of quality assurance agencies.
4. Operating at European level, EQAR is part of the European dimension and promotes these common principles throughout the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The Register is open to all quality assurance agencies that commit

to the ESG, regardless whether they are organised at national or European level, or based outside Europe.

5. EQAR facilitates cross-border activities and cooperation in external quality assurance. 8 of 17 quality assurance agencies on the Register<sup>11</sup> have already been working with higher education institutions in two or more European countries.

## The European quality assurance infrastructure

6. EQAR and other European associations and networks in the sector, such as the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) or the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA), assume different and complementary functions.

7. EQAR has the exclusive function to independently manage a Register of legitimate and credible quality assurance agencies operating in Europe. The relevant stakeholders jointly bear responsibility for EQAR's governance.

8. EQAR thus performs a unique function in the European quality assurance landscape. At the same time, EQAR does not duplicate the activities of the other European actors referred to in the Report, in particular ENQA, which are predominantly membership bodies providing a network, services and support to their members.

9. EQAR has noted with great interest the suggestions made in the Report for the further development of quality assurance in Europe. EQAR will take those into consideration in its internal discussions. In addition, the observations in the

Report will be useful in the self-evaluation EQAR will produce and report in 2010.

## Priority on transparency of external quality assurance

10. EQAR underlines the primary responsibility of higher education institutions for their quality. External quality assurance builds upon this and often combines a balance of accountability-driven and enhancement-led objectives. Comprehensive external quality reviews incorporate the different perspectives of institutions, students, staff and external stakeholders, rather than to provide simple answers.

11. EQAR calls upon those involved in the development of transparency tools, such as rankings or classifications, to refrain from suggesting a simplistic perspective on quality of higher education based on numbers and a seemingly universal definition of high quality. It should also be avoided that the vital balance between accountability and enhancement is distorted towards more or only control.

12. External quality assurance should remain the main external tool for assuring and enhancing quality of higher education in Europe. It will have to focus on accessibility and readability of results, so as to clearly demonstrate its benefits and to improve transparency and trust.

13. It is most appropriate to base transparency to all stakeholders in higher education on unbiased and comprehensive observations resulting from external QA which looks at the whole range of institutional activities from mission and strategy to performance results.

<sup>11</sup> See: <http://www.eqar.eu/register.html>

## The European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)

14. The European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) have developed into an important reference point for the development of internal and external quality assurance systems.

15. Any revision should be carried out with due care. It should be based on thorough consultation of all stakeholders on their experience in using and working with the ESG. The importance of the existence of stable and reliable criteria for external quality assurance agencies that seek inclusion on EQAR should be borne in mind.