DEQAR Conference & EQAR Members' Dialogue

From Quality to Automatic Recognition and Mobility

Event Report

| Date: | Monday | 7 October 2019 | 10:00 – 17:30 |
| | Tuesday | 8 October 2019 | 10:00 – 13:30 |

Hosted by: Universidad Carlos III de Madrid (UC3M) &
Crue Universidades Españolas

Location: UC3M, Puerta de Toledo Campus,
Ronda de Toledo 1, 28005 Madrid

Presentations: https://cloud.eqar.eu/s/Swkdbe88WF4t9kS

Participants:

• EQAR members (governments + stakeholders)	39
• QA agency representatives	28
• ENIC-NARICs	4
• Invited speakers and guests	20
• EQAR staff/committee members	14
Total	**105**

1. Objectives

The conference aimed to:

- Enable and support peer learning and exchange of experience among policy makers, stakeholders and researchers on quality assurance, automatic recognition and mobility;

- Present and discuss with participants the pilot studies;

- Explore good practices in the use of the database;

- Elicit suggestions on how to develop the database further.

2. Programme overview

The conference programme was made up of different sessions and formats, designed to cover all relevant topics and to use open, interactive formats extensively.

2.1 Plenary sessions

The first morning was held in plenary format, starting of with an opening session. Juan Romo (President of UC3M and Crue Universidades Españolas

Board member) welcomed participants, followed by Karl Dittrich (EQAR President) and José Manuel Pingarrón Carrazón (Secretary General of Universities, Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities of Spain).

The conference audience included participants from a diversity of backgrounds, with widely differing levels of prior knowledge about DEQAR. The opening session was therefore followed by a brief introduction to DEQAR and the current state of play, delivered by Colin Tück (EQAR, Director) and Kathryn Máthé (EQAR, Database Analyst). The main aim of the session was to bring all participants to the same level as regards the aims of the DEQAR project, the status of report submission by agencies, the coverage of higher education institutions in EHEA countries and figures on the use of DEQAR online. The session ended with a screening of the DEQAR explainer video.

Following the introduction, the conference keynote speech was delivered by Vanessa Debiais-Sainton (European Commission, DG EAC, Head of Unit Higher Education). She highlighted the developments and ambitious policy goals of the European Education Area (EEA), including three key initiatives: (1) automatic mutual recognition, (2) the European Student Card and (3) European Universities. She highlighted the importance of quality assurance systems both supporting and responding to these initiatives, and encouraged participants to discuss what challenges the key actors – governments, quality assurance agencies and higher education institutions – face and how they could be overcome. The keynote was followed by brief reflections on the topic by **Karl Dittrich (**EQAR, President) and **Fernando Miguel Galán Palomares (**ARQUS, Consortium Manager), which provided a good ground for discussion with the audience.

The second plenary session was dedicated to a presentation of the two DEQAR pilot studies, which used DEQAR as a data source to examine the translation of the ESG in institutional and programme quality assurance reports.

The studies were presented by Maria Manatos (Gent University). In the first pilot study, the focus was on how agencies translate the ESG into their standards for institutional external quality assurance and how expert panels then translate the ESG "on the ground", during the quality assurance process. The second pilot study focused on programme-level external quality assurance and specifically looked at cross-border accreditation reports in the field of engineering, at Bachelor level. Both studies zoomed in on specific ESG standards, chosen in line with the priorities of the Erasmus+ programme.

Following the presentation, Tia Loukkola (EUA, Director of Institutional Development) and Michal Karpíšek (EURASHE, Secretary General) responded to the studies, followed by a discussion with the audience.

The findings were discussed intensively. While the studies found that agencies clearly "translate" the ESG to their own context (and panels primarily work with the agency's "translation" rather than the ESG

themselves), it established that agencies stay relatively close to the ESG. Nevertheless, when taking a purely quantitative look at some word/concept occurrences, it seemed that some concepts mentioned in the ESG guidelines were not obviously translated into practice.

As the studies looked only at a small snapshot of external QA in Europe, it became clear that further analysis and research would be helpful to inform future policy debates, and that DEQAR can be a useful tool to facilitate such research.

2.2 Parallel sessions

The first half of the afternoon was held in three parallel sessions:

1. Studies and research on QA, made possible with DEQAR
2. Joining forces with DEQAR
3. European Universities and Quality Assurance

While the first two sessions were directly related to DEQAR, the third session responded to an important current policy development in the EHEA, even if only indirectly related to DEQAR.

Session 1 kicked off with a presentation by Marta van Zanten (Foundation for Advancement of International Medical Education and Research, FAIMER, USA), who had responded to the Call for Papers ahead of the conference. She explored whether data included in DEQAR could support the planned enhancements to the World Directory of Medical Schools. The publishers of the directory intend to add accreditation data to individual school records, beginning with decisions made by accrediting agencies that are recognised by the Word Federation for Medical Education (WFME).

She found that DEQAR may be a useful source, but was currently limited by the fact that only a few agencies are recognised by both EQAR and WFME, and not all their accreditation decisions were available in DEQAR yet. Her study also analysed how the accreditation decisions vary in meaning and consequence depending on the jurisdiction, purpose and scope of the accrediting agency.

During the discussion, participants explored commonalities and differences between EQAR, based on ESG standards, and WFME, based on it own standards. It was concluded that accreditation information was useful to a wide range of stakeholders, including governments, policy makers, educational institutions and the public, and that it was important to coordinate efforts to benefit from synergies.

Session 2 was organised as a guided discussion on the possibilities of linking up the larger constellation of different initiatives and projects which support recognition, cooperation and mobility in the EHEA by creating databases or digital infrastructures.

The session was moderated by Anthony Camilleri, a QA and recognition expert who is contributing to new Europass as interoperability expert. Panelists came from the European Commission (EAC, EMPL, JRC), CIMEA, the Spanish regional QAAs and EQAR.

All actors agreed on the importance of interoperability, but recognised that this goal was very far from being achieved. It was particularly worrying that there are no standards on even basic issues, such as the default identifier for an institution or a student. Panelists were glad to see that there are, however, some examples of project-to-project cooperation to promote interoperability, such as the DEQAR/ETER cooperation.

It was concluded that public authorities need a map of current technical standardisation initiatives in education and their interrelations, and to keep from funding new initiatives which introduce competing data models or standards to an already fragmented field; standardisation should be led by stakeholders in a collaborative approach, with the support and involvement of public authorities.

Session 3 focused on the European Universities initiative and how quality assurance could be "elevated" to the level of an entire European University (network), in addition to or instead of external quality assurance of the individual member institutions.

Mark Frederiks presented the EuniQ project, which set out to develop and pilot an approach to for joint quality assurance for European Universities. This was complemented by the perspective of one European University, CIVIS, represented by Carmela Calés Bourdet (Vice-Rector, Autonomous University of Madrid and Crue Board member).

The discussion reflected that the 17 selected European Universities have just started their work. While quality assurance was high on the networks' agendas, it would take additional time to fully develop approaches to network-wide internal quality assurance. Likewise, the EuniQ project had kicked off recently and would need to develop its approach based on how the European Universities actually function internally, rather than vice-versa.

2.3 World Cafés

The second half of the afternoon and the first half of the second morning were held in World Café format. This is a highly interactive format, which EQAR has used in many conferences with always extremely positive feedback from participants.

In each session, participants could choose from up to 10 tables, each dedicated to a specific topic, hosted by one presenter/facilitator. In each session, 4 rounds of 20 minutes each were held, that is, each participant could join 4 different tables/topics. Each "round" started off with a very brief introduction by the presenter/facilitator, followed by a discussion with participants for the remaining 15 minutes. As no more than 10 people joined

a table at once, the discussions were highly interactive, open and informal. As was EQAR's experience from previous years, the World Café in particular allowed otherwise "silent" participants to interact and engage more into discussions.

The first World Café session was dedicated to a number of topics directly related to DEQAR.

The second World Café session was dedicated to the broader field of quality assurance, addressing a number of current policy developments. These all define the context in which DEQAR operates and which it needs to reflect.

2.4 Agency Hub

Parallel to the second World Café, the agency hub was a technical discussion session dedicated to QA agencies' technical staff. The session addressed the agencies' feedback and open questions regarding data submission, as well as some future needs and developments which were identified during the DEQAR project and will need to be addressed in the future:

- Future ETER/OrgReg synchronisation
- English report summaries
- Approach to clustered/combined reports (several programmes)
- Multiple agency reports creation/ownership

2.5 Closing plenary session

The closing plenary session allowed all participants to listen to brief reports from the three parallel sessions and the key messages arising from each.

The reports were followed by a discussion amongst panelists and the audience. The panelists included the current BFUG Co-Chair, Birgitta Vuorinen (Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland), key user groups and stakeholders, represented by Luca Lantero (President of the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee Bureau, Head of the BFUG Secretariat) and Jakub Grodecki (ESU, Executive Committee), as well as a representative of QA agencies, Jasmina Havranek (ASHE, Director).
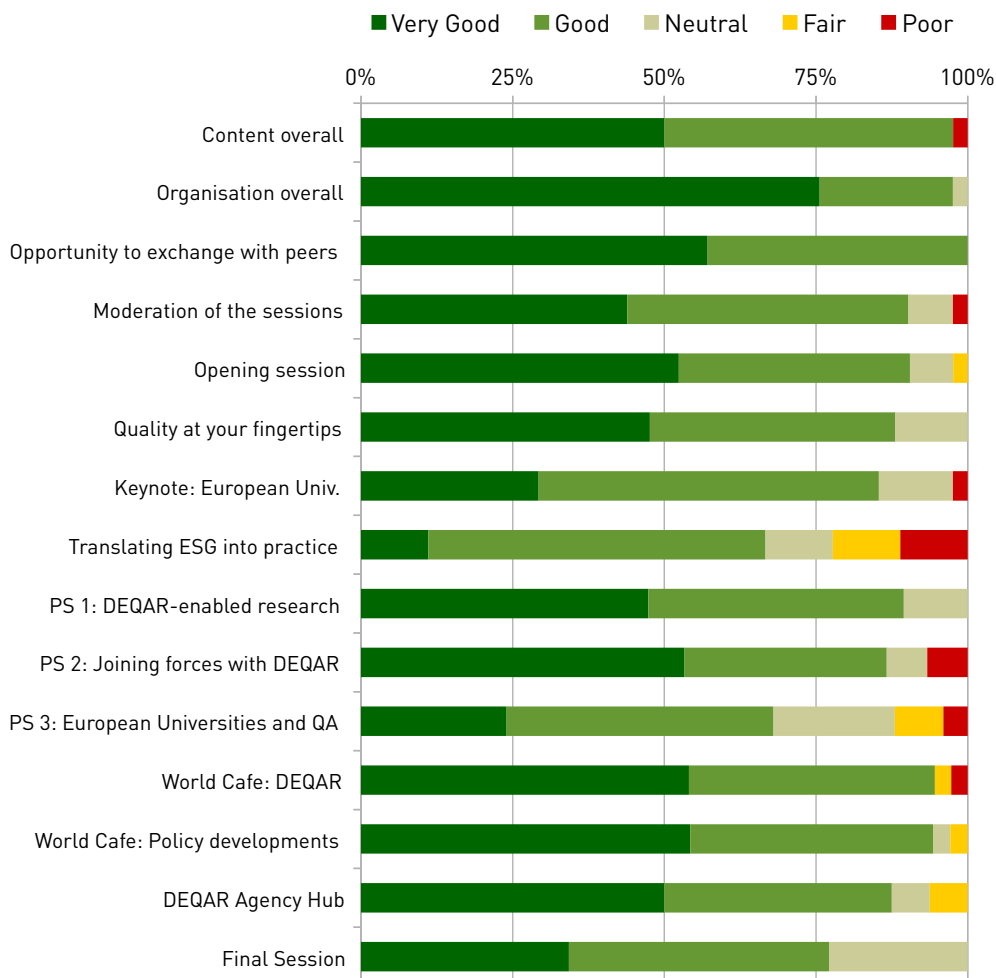
The discussion underlined the pivotal role that DEQAR can play as an information tool for the EHEA to facilitate automatic recognition but also other policy goals. The discussion emphasised the need for interoperability and ongoing dialogue with all key stakeholders and users to secure and enhance the usefulness of DEQAR.

3. Evaluation by participants

The evaluation form was available on-line as from the beginning of the conference. In the closing session, participants were encouraged to

complete the form. The form allowed participants to rate their satisfaction with the event overall as well as with the specific sessions (see form).

42 participants completed the feedback form, which is a very good turnout from EQAR's experience with other events. The following chart shows how participants have evaluated the different sessions:

As can be seen, participants have evaluated the event very positively, both in terms of content as well as logistics.

The form allowed participants to share additional comments, ca. 10 substantial comments were received. On the critical side, some comments asked for more time on the different World Café topics and some did not appreciate the breadth of topics, leading to a lack of a red line. Only one commenter found that the event was generally not sufficiently interactive.

On the positive side, several people commended the choice of topics and the ability to discuss and exchange with colleagues. In particular the World Café format received praise for its interactivity and ability to discuss many different topics.