EQAR Statement on the proposed Council Recommendation

Towards a more agile and forward-looking system of quality assurance

Implementation of EU and Bologna Process tools

EQAR welcomes the proposal tabled by the European Commission for a Council Recommendation on a European Quality Assurance and Recognition System in Higher Education.

This proposal paves the way for a more agile and future-oriented system of accreditation and quality assurance, offering an opportunity for EU member states to follow the EU recommendations and to fulfil their EHEA commitments through the full implementation of Bologna Process tools that have already been agreed to in relation to QA and recognition.

EQAR's indispensable role in ensuring ESG compliance

EQAR notes with satisfaction that its work is acknowledged as an indispensable contribution to the realisation of the European Education Area and to further the improvement of the transparency of higher education provisions through safeguarding quality assurance.

EQAR welcomes the recommendation to Member States to "*ensure that decisions on accreditation and registration of higher education institutions and programmes are made in a transparent and objective way, in accordance with the ESG, with the involvement of adequate expert input and the participation by the higher education community, including students and staff, in fostering a quality culture.*"

This recommendation affirms the "*EHEA key commitment on external quality assurance*"*, one of the foundational building blocks of EQAR (way before the key commitment came into existence), which is regrettably still not a reality in all EU and EHEA systems.

*A fully functioning quality assurance system is in operation nationwide, in which all higher education institutions are subject to regular external quality assurance by an agency that has successfully demonstrated compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG) through registration on EQAR.

Support of the further development of DEQAR as a trustworthy source of information

EQAR welcomes the intent of the Commission to support the further development of DEQAR** and echoes the call to Member States to encourage the publication of external quality assurance reports in the DEQAR database *"to improve the transnational transparency of the quality of higher education provision"*.

EQAR looks forward to welcoming further collaborations and offering technical support to recognition centres and officers in using DEQAR data in the recognition workflows.

While Member States agreed in the 2018 Council Recommendation on automatic mutual recognition of higher education, recognition procedures can still be rather onerous. Robust quality assurance systems are the basis to foster the necessary trust to ensure automatic recognition. EQAR contributes to this by fulfilling its mission and by making public in a transparent and meaningful way, through DEQAR, the external quality assurance decisions and reports of the EQAR registered agencies. EQAR also helps to understand reports in their context by describing the national QA frameworks of the European Higher Education Area countries through its Knowledge base.

In addition to welcoming collaborations with recognition centers, EQAR will continue to promote DEQAR and work on increasing its visibility and accessibility to a wider public.

**"*The Commission intends to support the further development of the Database of External Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR), managed by EQAR, building on good practice by recognition information centres that use it for automatic recognition.*"

Building the foundations towards a European Degree

European university alliances and other consortia and groups of higher educations institutions, who are at the forefront of transnational cooperation often face multiple obstacles when developing a joint education provision. Obstacles such as multiple or diverging administrative procedures, colliding criteria and different accreditation periods in the EHEA may lead to uncertainties for the higher education institutions and potentially make the planning and organisation of joint programmes and their quality assurance, particularly challenging.

EQAR continues to strongly advocate the use of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes by the European Alliances and/or any other consortia/HEIs working on establishing joint programmes. The European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes was approved by ministers in 2015 and remains the best suited methodology to quality assure joint programmes. It is based on the ESGs and the principle

that quality assurance should respond to the diversity of higher education systems, institutions, programmes and students.

EQAR, being the official Register of quality assurance agencies that work in line with the ESG – a gatekeeper for reliable quality assurance agencies – also supports the recommendation that organisations awarding a possible European degree label and institutions awarding a possible European Degree, work in alignment with commonly agreed, well established and practiced ESG standards.

EQAR is looking forward to exploring ways of presenting accurate data on joint degrees meeting the European criteria in a user-friendly way in DEQAR.

EQAR is also keen on contributing to both the "annual European degree forum", once set up and the "European degree policy lab", once established, by bringing in and sharing expertise together with other stakeholders.