The Rise of International Accrediting Agencies

Break-out session:
An Overview of External Quality Assurance Developments within EHEA

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Outline of the presentation

1. EQAR: Structure, Mission and Objectives
2. Recent developments the activity and recognition of QA agencies across borders
   A. RIQAA 2013/2014
   B. Survey results on:
      - The international activities of QAAs
      - Cross-border external QA activity of agencies
3. Facilitating trust and recognition of cross-border EQA activities of QAAs (break-out group discussion)
1. EQAR: Structure, Mission and Objectives
About EQAR

Register of quality assurance agencies that comply substantially with European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG)

- Established by E4 at the EHEA Ministers’ request
- Jointly governed by stakeholders (E4, social partners) and EHEA governments
- External review of agencies by independent experts
- Independent Register Committee
  - Composed of 11 quality assurance experts
  - Nominated by E4, but not representatives
  - Takes all decisions related to registration
Mission and objectives

Promoting the further development of a coherent and flexible quality assurance system for Europe as a whole

Transparency and Information
- Information on bona fide agencies
- Prevent „accreditation mills“ from gaining credibility

Trust and Recognition
- Enhance trust in and recognition of QA results
- Support recognition of qualifications/periods of study
- Allow registered QA agencies to operate across the entire EHEA, HE institution to choose agency
2. Recent developments in the activity and recognition of QA agencies across borders
EQAR’s role in the EHEA

- European reference point for QAAs working in substantial compliance with the ESG;
  
  “The purpose of the register is to allow all stakeholders and the general public open access to objective information about trustworthy quality assurance agencies that are working in line with the ESG” (London Communique, 2007)

- Ensure trust and recognition in QAAs
  
  “[...]to enhance confidence in higher education in the EHEA and beyond, and facilitate the mutual recognition of quality assurance and accreditation decisions” (London Communique, 2007)

- Facilitate cross-border recognition of QAAs
  
  “We will allow EQAR-registered agencies to perform their activities across the EHEA, while complying with national requirements. In particular, we will aim to recognise quality assurance decisions of EQAR-registered agencies on joint and double degree programmes.” (Bucharest Communiqué [2012])
RIQAA Work Plan 2013/2014

1. Desk research mapping recognition of EQAR-registered QAAs across the EHEA
2. Qualitative analysis on the rational for international activity of (EQAR-registered) quality assurance agencies
   • Survey “Cross Border Activities of QAAs” (February – March 2014);
   • A seminar for quality assurance agency representatives (Bayreuth, 29-30 April 2014)
3. Overview of 12 institutional experiences with international quality reviews
4. Final project report & final conference (Rome, 22-23 October 2014 - TBC)
Survey on Cross-border activities of QAAs

- Carried out between February – March 2014
- 85 QAAs contacted, 42 QAAs responded
- 26 EHEA & 4 non-EHEA (see map)
Scope of the survey:

To extend our understanding on the EQA activities of QAAs within different national contexts, in particular on the practices and procedures employed by agencies and their rational for cross-border external QA activities.

Profile of QAAs:

Wide range of QAAs

- national, international, or regionally established
- carrying out reviews (audits, accreditation, or evaluation) for specific disciplines or across different fields of study
- 24 out of 42 QAAs are listed in EQAR
- Only 3 QAAs with no international QA activity
Overview of QAA’s international and EQA activities

- Yes, the agency collaborated with other agencies across borders: 76%
- Yes, other type of QA activities: 48%
- Yes, the agency carries out external QA reviews across borders: 43%
- No: 7%
Type of international cooperation activities/projects:

- international projects (CeQuint, QUEST, Qrossroads, MULTRA, ECA\textsc{p}ED\textsc{i}A, IMPALA, Twinning, NOQA, GICAQ project, QACHE, ESAB\textsc{i}H);

- involvement in different European (ENQA, CEENQA, ECA, REACU) or other international networks/associations (INQAAHE, ANQAHE);

- development of new legislation or new national QA systems, in exchanging experts;

- 14 out of 39 international active responding QAAs have also established collaboration activities with non-EHEA partners (e.g. Nuffic project in Yemen, GIQAC project funded by World Bank and supported by Unesco, USAID in Ethiopia).
Overview of EQA activities of agencies across borders (17 respondents)

Profile of QAAs carrying out reviews across borders:
- 16 of 17 QAAs coming from EHEA
- 15 of 17 QAAs are listed in EQAR (approximately half of all EQAR-registered agencies)

A dense web of reviews:

The EQA activities (accreditation/audit/evaluation) spanned across 33 EHEA and 28 non-EHEA member countries and territories

Since 2010 the EQA reviews were carried out
- from ten to 30 different countries (other than their own) each year.
- 79 cross-border external QA reviews in the EHEA and 36 external reviews in non-EHEA countries and territories
## Status and recognition of EQA activities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(1) Outcome/decision directly recognised</th>
<th>(2) Final decision by national QA body</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>(A) All HEI’s, all external QA</strong></td>
<td>LI, RO, FI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(B) Some HEI’s or some types of external QA only</strong></td>
<td>AT, CH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(C) Only joint degrees or specific circumstances</strong></td>
<td>DK, PL</td>
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Additionally the EQA reviews can:

- take the form of cooperation with the nationally recognised QA body (AEC collaboration with ANQA, ZEVa, SKVC etc.)
- or to gain an additional external feedback (IEP reviews, evalag review of an institution in Hungary)
Some findings:

Does your agency have specific policies regarding cross-border QA reviews?

- Yes: 65%
- No: 35%

Have you contacted other HE competent authorities from the country of the reviewed institution?

- Yes, the national QA agency(ies): 76%
- Yes, the ministry: 59%
- Yes, other: 6%
- No: 12%
Criteria and processes employed by QAAs across borders

- **Same as employed for its “home” EQA framework**
  - 59% (No web link)
  - 65% (Web link)
  - 63% (No web link)
  - 76% (Web link)

- **The foreign country’s criteria**
  - 35% (No web link)
  - 24% (Web link)
  - 25% (No web link)
  - 24% (Web link)

- **Both QAAs’s “home” and foreign country’s EQA framework**
  - 24% (No web link)
  - 6% (Web link)
  - 18% (No web link)
  - 18% (Web link)

- **Specific rules for cross-border reviews**
  - 29% (No web link)
  - 25% (Web link)
  - 24% (No web link)
  - 18% (Web link)

- **Depending on the HEIs needs**
  - 29% (No web link)
  - 29% (Web link)
  - 19% (No web link)
  - 12% (Web link)

- **QAA’s publication of review reports**
  - **External QA carried out within EHEA**
    - No web link: 42%
    - Web link: 58%
  - **External QA carried out outside EHEA**
    - No web link: 56%
    - Web link: 44%

- **a) Criteria for decisions and formal outcomes**
- **b) Composition of the expert group**
- **c) Publication of reports**
- **d) Appeals or complaints procedure**
- **e) Follow-up activities**
C. Facilitating trust and recognition of cross-border EQA activities of QAAs.
1. **Practices and procedures employed by agencies in their cross-border reviews**
   - Are the criteria and processes employed by the agency the same as in the home EQA framework? If not, where can the differences be found?
   - Are there differences in the composition of the review team, publication of reports, follow-up activities? If yes, why? And how are these practices managed by the agency?
   - How are the European Standards and Guidelines underpinning cross-border reviews?
   - What are implications for the recognition of qualifications and quality assurance decisions?

2. **Benefits and the challenges for QAAs to pursue cross-border reviews**
   - What are the benefits and challenges related to agencies’ cross-border reviews? How can the challenges be addressed?
   - What is the recognition status of EQA activities for a non-national QAA? What are the challenges for the recognition of joint programmes and degrees? How can they be addressed?
   - What are the main actions that can facilitate external QA reviews (evaluation, audit, and accreditation) across borders? At what level should these changes be made (international, national, institutional)?
   - What are the main reasons for HEIs to carry out an external QA review with a foreign QAA?
Compare discussion with Survey Results

QAA's perceived benefits for engaging in a EQA across borders

- gaining a better understanding of other HE systems
- improving QAAs own criteria and procedures;
- broadening the understanding of quality (e.g. quality enhancement vs. quality assurance) and quality assurance policies and regulations within EHEA and non-EHEA countries/territories;
- expanding their own network;
- increasing their flexibility and adaptability to other national systems;
- increasing their national and international profile.

HEI's motivation for turning to a foreign QAA for an EQA review

- To get an evaluation that fits their own profile
- To improve the mobility of their graduates and recognition of their degrees;
- To accredit joint programmes;
- To improve their international recognition and reputation;
Challenges of cross-border QA reviews

- Gaining a clear understanding of the higher education system where the HEI operates;
- Managing the right balance with the national required criteria and their own criteria;
- Finding suitable peers for the review and in overcoming language barriers;
- Adapting and gaining recognition of their external quality assurance procedures in a country with a restrictive or unclear national legislation.
QAAs have approached national authorities and/or local QAAs to clarify the requirements of the national EQA framework and ensuring mutual trust.

Overcoming challenges

Have you contacted other HE competent authorities from the country of the reviewed institution?

- Yes, the national QA agency(ies): 76%
- Yes, the ministry: 59%
- No: 12%
- Yes, other: 6%
Measures to facilitate EQA activities of agencies across borders (39 respondents)

At international level:

- Promoting the ESG as the core element of trust and recognition within the EHEA.
- Development of procedures/policies for the recognition of accreditation decisions of joint programmes.
- Direct financial resources to QA agencies to support international quality assurance activities and reviews.
- Establishing and agreeing on trans-national quality seals and common policies for the publication of evaluation reports.
- Organisation of international benchmarking seminars.
- Developing a data-base of international experts.
- EQAR-registration as a reference for cross-border external QA reviews.
- Promoting the use of standardised information on each countries requirements on cross-border reviews to facilitate QAAs first contact with that country and dissemination of results from cross-border reviews.
- Regulation to prevent the negative effects of a possible “marketisation” of QAAs activities across borders.
Measures to facilitate EQA activities of agencies across borders (39 respondents)

At national level:

- Ensuring a more flexible and transparent national regulation for the work of foreign QAAs.
- Making available national rules and criteria in a widely spoken language.
- Encouraging national agencies to cooperate with field specific international QAAs.
- Raising awareness on the benefits of recognising the diversification of QA practices and removing the strains for HEIs who are duplicating these reviews.
QAA’s perception on the reasoning for countries to open up their HE system to cross-border EQA (39 respondents)

- improvement of the national systems of education;
- fostering the ingoing and outgoing mobility for students and employees;
- ensuring international recognition of higher education institutions and study programmes;
- improving the transparency and comparability of higher education systems and reducing the risk of "inbreeding".