

# Overview of cross-border QA and introduction of the E4/EQAR Key Considerations

Working Group 2: on Implementation  
Nice, 9 November 2016  
Melinda Szabo, Project Officer (EQAR)

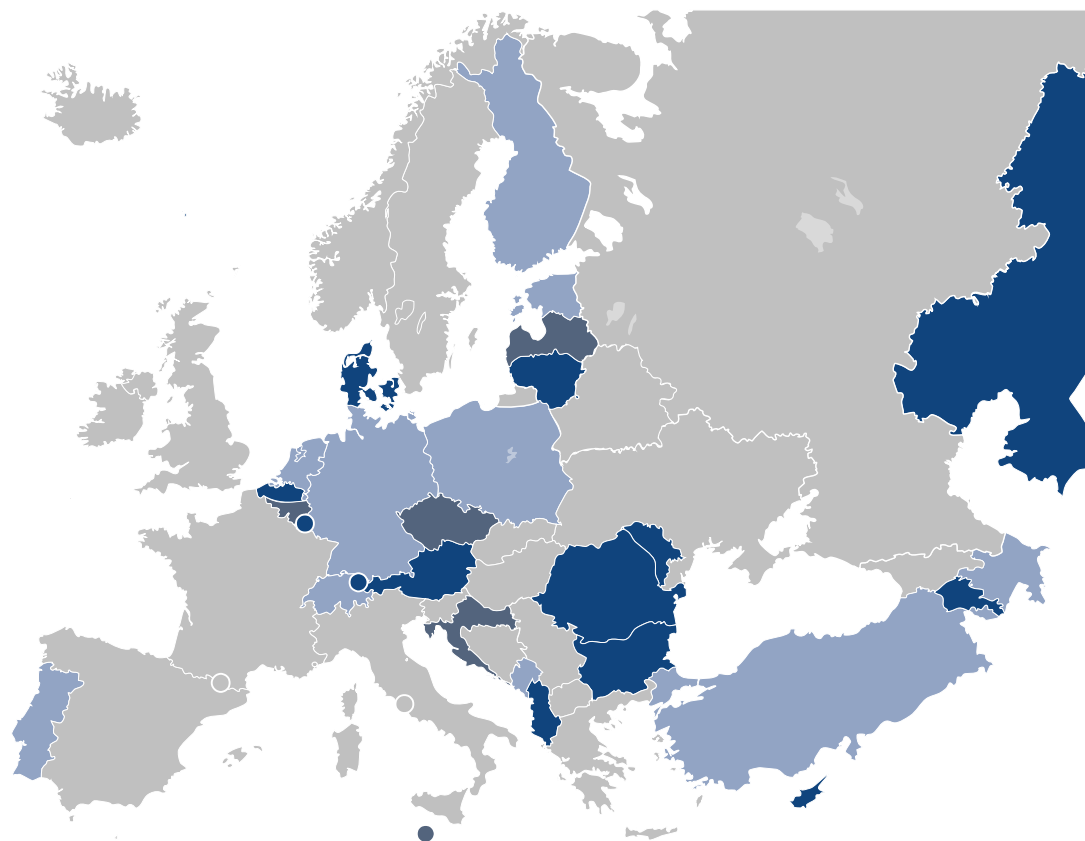
# Contents



- 1) Overview of Cross-Border QA
- 2) Key Considerations on CBQA (draft)
  - 1) Engaging in
  - 2) Carrying out
  - 3) Addressing results

# CBQA: national legal frameworks lag behind

- Despite the robust European framework in place ...
  - Cross-border accreditation/ evaluation not fully recognised
  - In addition/parallel to obligatory national external QA
  - Duplication of efforts for institutions



- Recognising EQAR-registered agencies as part of the national requirements for external QA
- Recognising foreign agencies with own/specific framework
- Discussions ongoing
- Countries not recognising external QA by foreign agency

# EQAR – system information on legal frameworks



## Austria

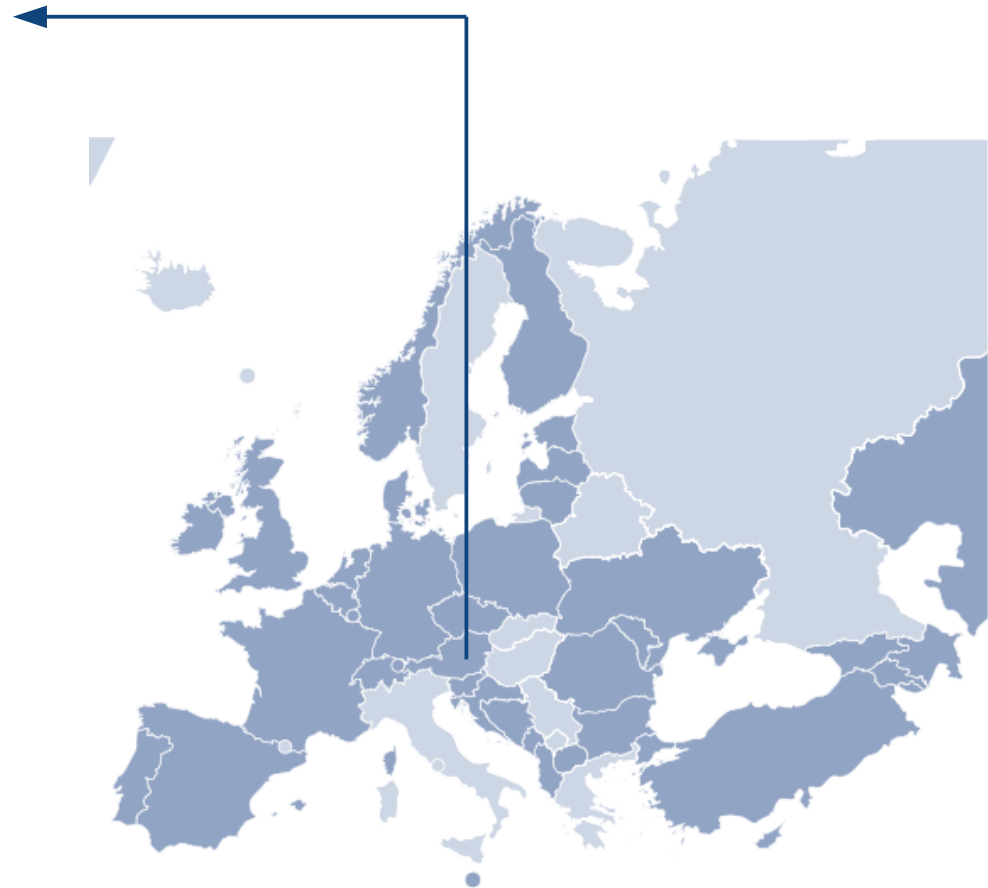
Austria has been a Governmental Member of EQAR since 2008.

### Focus of external quality assurance

- *Public universities:* Institutional audit
- *Universities of applied sciences:* Institutional and initial programme accreditation; Institutional audit (after an uninterrupted accreditation period of 12 years)
- *Private universities:* Institutional and initial programme accreditation
- *University colleges of teacher education:* own methodology

### Can higher education institutions choose a suitable EQAR-registered agency?

- *Public universities:* yes.
- *Universities of applied science:* after having been re-accredited by the national Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria)
- *Private universities & university colleges of teacher education:* no.
- **Eligibility requirements for foreign agencies:**
  - Registration on EQAR
  - QA agencies have to submit an expression of interest to the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy.
- **Condition for the agency's work:** compliance with the criteria by the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy.
- **Further information/regulations:** [↗ Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education \(HS-QSG\) from March 2012 \(§ 19.\) \(page 14\)](#) & [↗ BMWF Presentation](#)

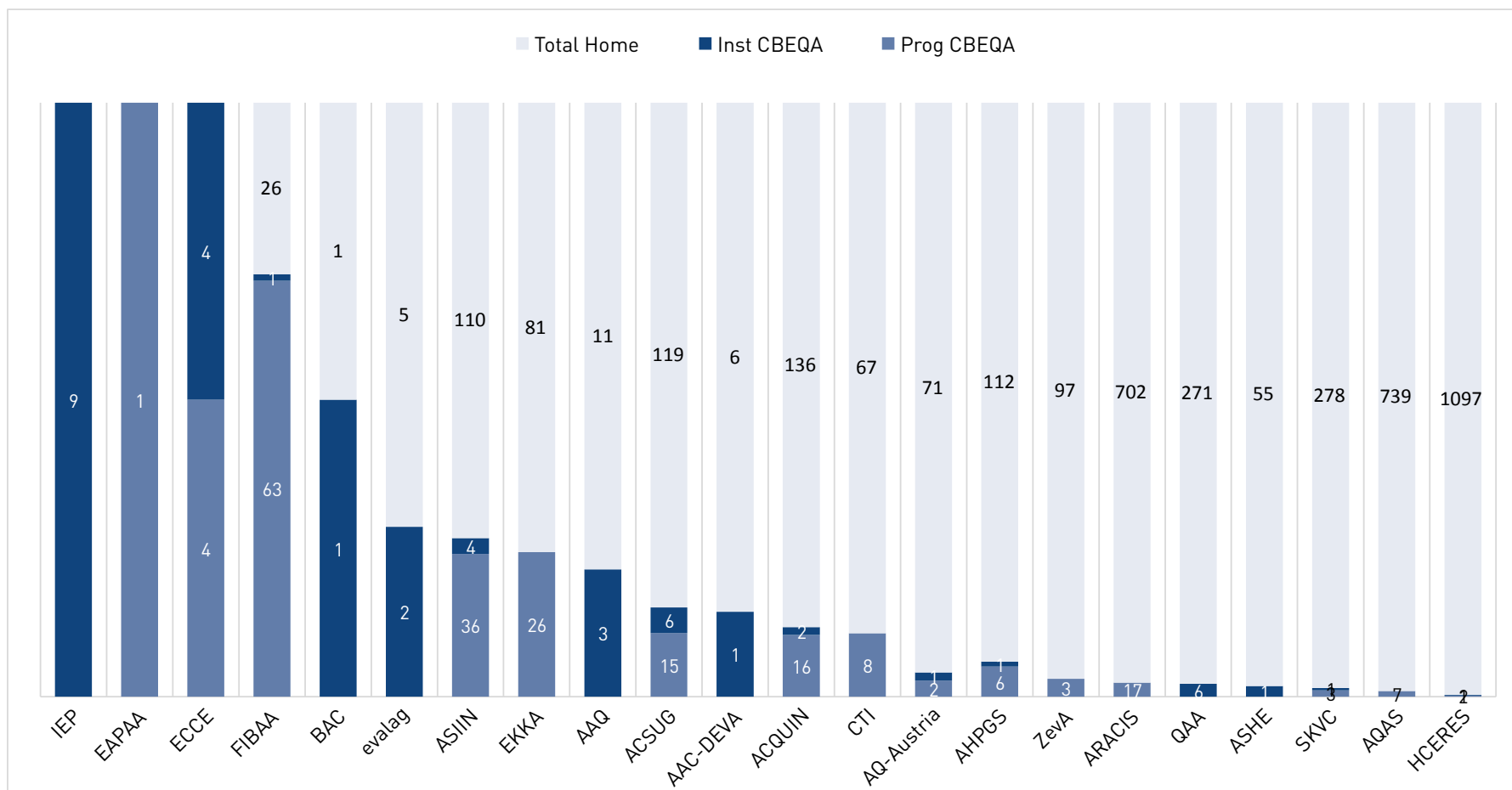


# CBQA: opportunities & challenges (RIQAA project)

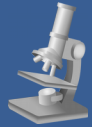


	Opportunities	Challenges
Higher Education Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• International visibility</li><li>• Valuable feedback</li><li>• Increased commitment</li><li>• Different approaches</li><li>• Suit their own mission</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify suitable agency</li><li>• Workload and costs</li><li>• Unknown expectations</li><li>• Language</li></ul>
Quality Assurance Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• International profile</li><li>• Experience relevant for work at home</li><li>• Diversification</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Unfamiliar context</li><li>• Adapting standards</li><li>• Language</li></ul>

# Quality assurance crossing borders



# EQAR monitoring practices



Registration based on external review of agency



Annual updates on reviews and countries



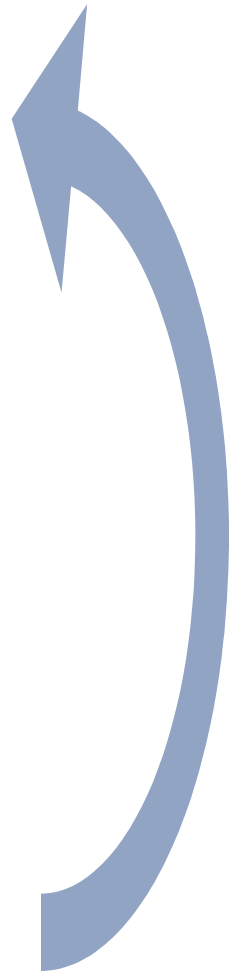
Substantive change reports



Third-party complaints



Periodic renewal every 5 years



## 2. E4/EQAR Key Considerations for CBQA

Ad hoc group: : E4 Group and EQAR:



- ✓ Group formed following up recommendation from RIQAA project (2014)
- ✓ Key Considerations for CBQA ≠ prescriptive manual for CBQA
- ✓ Set out to support and inspire HEIs, QAAs and also a useful reference for governments to adapt or review their legal framework
- ✓ Reaffirm ESG as the basis for CBQA





# Key Considerations for CBQA - draft -



Key issues (following a chronological EQA order) that should be taken into consideration by HEIs and QAAs:

- A. Engaging in cross-border QA
  - Rationale, suitable agency, legal framework, internal and external stakeholders
- B. Carrying out cross-border QA
  - Procedures, preparation, expert selection/training, practical specificities
- C. Addressing the results of cross-border QA
  - Recognition, complaints, appeals, follow-up

# Engaging in (1)



## **What is the rationale for engaging in cross-border QA?**

An institution planning to engage in cross-border QA should thoroughly consider the **aims of the process** and the **expected added-value**. It should consider whether it will be **part of the national mandatory QA** or be **in addition to** an external QA procedure required in the national legal framework; and how this choice fits in its **long-term QA strategy**.

An agency should similarly consider and reflect on the aims and reasons for engaging in such activities and whether they **fit with its scope of activities**. If a joint programme is being reviewed, a procedure under the **European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes** should be undertaken.

## **Which QA agency is fit for purpose for this specific case?**

The chosen agency should be **EQAR-registered** in order to ensure that it operates in accordance with the ESG. The institution should look carefully at the **procedures** the chosen QA agency uses to ensure that they are appropriate for the institutional context, that they are compatible with the aims and expected benefits of the process and that, if necessary, they meet any national legal requirements. The agency should consider whether it is in a position to carry out the external QA requested by the higher education institution.

# Engaging in (2)



## **What is the legal framework prescribing?**

The cross-border QA activity may be contingent on the national higher education framework and other specific national regulation. In case cross-border QA is part of national mandatory QA, the institution and QA agency should **consult and involve as appropriate national regulatory bodies** (such as ministries or accreditation councils). It is important that **information about legal frameworks and national criteria is readily available** and that both the institution and the QA agency inform themselves to ensure a proper understanding of the legal framework.

## **What other aspects (beyond the legal framework) need to be considered beforehand?**

While acknowledging the benefits that would result from cross-border QA, the institution should also consider aspects such as **resources, public procurements procedures, language matters**, as well as **additional workload** before committing to cross-border QA. Similarly, the QA agency would benefit from assessing its expertise and capacity to conduct cross-border QA, maintaining its professional standards and integrity.

## Engaging in (3)



### **Has the institution communicated its decision to undergo cross-border QA to relevant stakeholders?**

The institution should ensure that the decision to undergo cross-border QA and the reasons behind choosing a foreign agency are properly communicated to the institutional community, including students.

The purpose and goals of the cross-border QA procedure should be clear for all involved.

The full awareness and commitment of institutional stakeholders will support a meaningful cross-border QA process.

# Carrying out (1)



## **Will the agency need to modify its procedures as a result of the cross-border setting?**

Once the QA agency has decided to engage in cross-border QA, it should consider whether its **procedures** remain the same in a cross-border context. While the ESG provide a framework for all QA activities in the EHEA, they may be implemented in different ways in different contexts. **Specific adaptations** might be required based on the legal framework and the education system's traditions and structure. Any alterations to the agency's procedures should remain **in line with the ESG** and be made publicly available.

## **What sort of preparation supports successful cross-border QA?**

**A preliminary meeting** between the agency and the institution can help ensure a shared understanding of the national and institutional context and the forthcoming QA process. The preparation would normally also include a **formal agreement outlining i.a. the aims of the procedure and responsibilities of all parties**. For further background information in preparing the procedure, the **agency should inform itself** of previous external QA reports and decisions concerning the institution.

## Carrying out (2)



### **How are the peer-review experts selected and trained?**

The QA agency should ensure the **transparent and appropriate selection and training of the peer-review experts**. Specific training and briefing of peer-review experts is particularly important if they are working in an **unfamiliar context**. The institution may also brief the peer-review experts on relevant contextual issues. The institution and the peer-review experts should be sensitive to cultural and contextual differences.

### **Are the practical specificities of carrying out cross-border QA clear for both parties?**

The practicalities of cross-border QA set out in the formal agreement between both parties may include aspects such as **language considerations** and specificities of the site visit(s). The QA agency should clarify any language requirements in conducting cross-border QA. This has implications on the composition of the team of peer-review experts. The institution should **consider the time and resources required** to provide, if necessary, translations of relevant documents and interpretation during the site visit(s). Both the QA agency and the institution should clarify in advance the particular arrangements for the site visit(s). Communication between the agency/team of peer-review experts and the institution should address various issues, which may include, in addition to language aspects, the **length of the site visit(s), time allocated for interviews and selection of interviewees**.

# Addressing results (1)



## **If applicable, what is the recognition process of a cross-border QA decision?**

The agency and institution should take into account any **additional steps necessary for the recognition** by the relevant national bodies of any decision following the completion of a cross-border QA procedure that is part of the **national mandatory QA**. Furthermore, in the context of qualifications frameworks, the outcomes of cross-border QA might have an impact on the **recognition of the institution's qualifications nationally and internationally**. While the style of reporting varies from one QA agency to another, any requirements of national criteria should be addressed in the structuring and contents of the report to ensure its recognition if the process is part of the national mandatory QA. The agency should ensure the publication of and access to the full report.

# Addressing results (2)



## **What are the complaints, appeals and follow-up processes?**

The QA agency should consider [cross-border specificities in its complaints and appeals processes, based on the ESG](#). Further, in case of substantiated concerns about an agency's compliance with the ESG, [EQAR's Complaints Policy](#) should be referred to.

Both the QA agency and the institution should be aware of their respective responsibilities to ensure [a proper follow-up to the external QA process](#). If the process is part of the national mandatory QA, the institution should consider whether there is any discrepancy or incompatibility between the agency's follow-up procedure and any national requirements (e.g. timeframes for subsequent procedures).



# Key questions:



1. Have you discussed the recognition of EQA by suitable EQAR-registered agencies at national level? What are the views of different stakeholders?
2. Do you think that the ESG and EQAR's existing monitoring instruments, supplemented by the Key Considerations, are a sound framework for cross-border QA?
3. What are the main questions arising in your national framework?
4. Is there a need for further guidance addressing governments specifically and, if so, in which areas?
5. What are the good practices you have encountered? What are the risks and challenges you have encountered?

Thank you for your attention!



@EQAR\_he , @euatweets, @eurashe,  
@enqatwt, @esutwt

