

Code of Conduct

Executive Board

1. Purpose and Scope

This Code of Conduct aims to promote EQAR's values and ethical and responsible conduct of those acting on the organisation's behalf.

All EQAR officials are bound by the Code of Conduct in their activities for EQAR. This includes all staff members, members of the Executive Board, Register Committee and Appeals Committee, as well as of any ad hoc groups or committees, unless otherwise specified.

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2. Values

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.

(Mission Statement)

3. Principles

EQAR officials are expected to:

- recognise that EQAR fulfils a public function and acts in the public interest;
- respect and promote EQAR's values in their conduct;
- ensure integrity in their work and perform their tasks up to professional standards;
- honour confidentiality of information that is not in the public domain;
- be tolerant and do not discriminate on the basis of nationality, ethnic background, gender, political, sexual or religious orientation.

4. Conflicts of Interest

An EQAR official must recuse themselves from any matter for which a real or apparent conflict of interest exists.

A “real conflict of interest” means that an individual has private interests (i.e. personal or organisational interests other than those of EQAR) which influence their analysis or decisions. An “apparent conflict of interest” means any situation where it could reasonably be perceived that an individual’s personal interests might influence their analysis or decisions.

With regard to applicant or registered agencies an official is considered to have a conflict of interest if, for example, s/he:

1. holds/held a position, whether paid or unpaid, with the agency (for example as an employee, consultant, subcontractor, member of the board or a committee) during the past 5 years;
2. is/was involved in the external review of the agency during the past 2 years;
3. holds a position in an entity currently being reviewed by the agency;
4. any of the above applies to an immediate family member.

The above rules (except no. 2) apply *mutatis mutandis* to members of a review panel for the purpose of an application to EQAR.

5. Integrity

EQAR officials are expected to always act in a manner that ensures the integrity of EQAR as an independent and respectable organisation. EQAR officials may therefore not accept any reward or attention that could cause an impression of influence by third parties or of third parties expecting specific action from EQAR in return.

Beyond reasonable hospitality in the form of travel, accommodation and meals offered in the context of an official visit, only gifts of symbolic/nominal value may be accepted, under no circumstances exceeding a value of 100€.

Speaker fees may be accepted from organisations that are not quality assurance agencies (and could potentially be applicants for registration), provided that this might not constitute a real or apparent conflict of interest otherwise. Any fees received in relation to EQAR business must be paid to EQAR.

6. Incompatibilities

In the interest of ensuring integrity and avoiding any potential conflicts of interest, being EQAR staff or a member of the Register Committee is incompatible with:

- holding an executive or representative function in one of the organisations that nominate members to the Register Committee (“nominating organisations”);

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- officially representing¹ or speaking on behalf of a nominating organisation;
- participating in reviews of quality assurance agencies which serve to support an application for inclusion on the Register or for renewal of registration.

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The EQAR President and staff members must not hold any functions, memberships, contracts or other relationships with an EQAR member, a registered agency or any other quality assurance agency, nor any function with another organisation if that function could jeopardise the independence of EQAR in any way.

7. Transparency

The EQAR President, members of the Register Committee, Appeals Committee and staff are required to disclose to EQAR any functions, memberships, contracts or other relationships maintained with quality assurance agencies or EQAR members, as well as any other circumstances that might constitute a real or apparent conflict of interest.

In the interest of full transparency, EQAR makes public these officials' interests on its website.

Whenever speaking or acting in public, EQAR officials should ensure clarity when they are acting on behalf of EQAR. EQAR officials should only speak or act on behalf of EQAR if and as far as mandated by the President or Director.

8. Concerns

Any third party (organisations as well as individuals) may raise a concern towards EQAR as to whether an official has acted in accordance with this Code of Conduct to EQAR.

Such concerns should be referred to the President or the Director of the Secretariat, as appropriate. A concern should clearly specify the individual concerned and the occasion that caused the concern.

For concerns regarding the work of a registered agency, please refer to the Complaints Policy.

For concerns regarding a decision by the Register Committee (e.g. on an application), please refer to the Appeals Procedure.

¹E.g. being attributed as a representative of the organisation when being a speaker or participant in a meeting or conference. This does not exclude being suggested by a nominating organisation as speaker, expert or similar either in a personal capacity or as representative of an organisation that does not nominate RC members.