

MusiQuE position paper on the European Quality Assurance and Recognition System



How to overcome challenges and obstacles to cross-border quality assurance in higher education

Introduction to MusiQuE – Music Quality Enhancement

MusiQuE – Music Quality Enhancement (www.musique-ge.eu) is a cross-border subject-specific organisation for quality enhancement in higher music education. Its mission is stated as follows:

MusiQuE works internationally to uphold and advance the quality of music education

Operating throughout Europe and beyond, MusiQuE believes in the strength and added value of involving international perspectives in quality enhancement. This is even more relevant when considering the highly international nature of the music and performing arts professions.

The governance structure and activities of MusiQuE involve stakeholders from both the education sector (at various educational levels) and the professional field of music and performing arts. Considerations on lifelong learning and the needs of the profession are therefore important aspects in MusiQuE's work.

MusiQuE was legally established as a foundation in 2014 and has been registered on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) since 2015.

MusiQuE – a subject-specific answer to the Bologna process

MusiQuE is fully based on principles with regard to quality assurance in higher education that have been agreed upon within the European Union and the Bologna Process.

- A. In the *Recommendation of the European Parliament and of The Council of 15 February 2006 on further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education*¹, it is recommended that member states:
4. “enable higher education institutions active within their territory to choose among quality assurance or accreditation agencies in the European Register an agency which meets their needs and profile, provided that this is compatible with their national legislation or permitted by their national authorities;
 5. allow higher education institutions to work towards a complementary assessment by another agency in the European Register, for example to enhance their international reputation”.
- B. In the *Yerevan Communiqué* of 2015² in the context of the Bologna Declaration process, EHEA ministers committed to allowing:
- “higher education institutions to use a suitable EQAR registered agency for their external quality assurance process, respecting the national arrangements for the decision-making on QA outcomes”.

Challenges of and obstacles to subject-specific cross-border quality

Despite these agreed principles, MusiQuE, as an EQAR-registered quality enhancement organisation active at transnational level, faces **challenges and obstacles** on a daily basis, which can be divided into two situations:

1. In several EHEA countries, MusiQuE is still **not allowed to function despite its EQAR registration**: clear evidence of this situation can be found at <https://www.eqar.eu/kb/cross-border-qa/mapping-system-openness-to-cbqa>³.
2. In several EHEA countries where MusiQuE is **formally allowed to function based on its EQAR registration**, the following obstacles are experienced:

¹ See <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/aa1b7d1f-43f1-4f50-bbb7-462f11909f85/language-en>.

² See https://www.ehea.info/media/ehea.info/file/2015_Yerevan/70/7/YerevanCommuniqueFinal_613707.pdf.

³ See: *Countries not recognising foreign agencies as part of the national external QA requirements*.

- **Additional national registration procedures** with formal requirements, costs, and complex mapping exercises to compare national and MusiQuE standards;
- **Additional procedures for the recognition/approval of MusiQuE decisions** by national agencies or authorities;
- **A lack of level playing field with regard to cost:** institutions have to pay fees for the MusiQuE procedures, but no or strongly reduced fees for those executed by the national agencies. Many institutions are therefore not able to choose another agency than the national one for financial reasons;
- **Language requirements**, e.g. for self-evaluation and/or review reports, making it less evident for institutions to choose a procedure with international peers and internationally recognised standards.

As a result, many higher (music) education institutions cannot freely work with an EQAR registered agency of their choice, even when this is formally allowed. **It is therefore difficult in many EHEA countries to have programmes and/or institutions undergo a subject-specific and internationally recognised review procedure, which could confirm those programmes' and/or institutions' high subject-specific quality standards from an international perspective and, therefore, their international reputation.**

Conclusion: when reviewing the *Recommendation of the European Parliament and of The Council of 15 February 2006 on further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education*, **the majority of recommendations have been fulfilled, except those proposing that institutions should have a choice among EQAR registered agencies.**

Further measures are therefore needed.

Recommendations for further measures

In view of the upcoming Council recommendation on a European Quality Assurance and Recognition System in higher education, MusiQuE recommends to the European Commission, the Bologna Thematic Peer Group C (TPG C) on Quality Assurance, and EQAR the following:

- A. **At national level: EU member states and EHEA countries should review the formal status and recognition of activities executed by cross-border EQAR registered agencies in their countries and seek to resolve obstacles with regard to additional registration and recognition requirements, and additional costs.** This review should involve the TPG C on Quality Assurance and/ or EQAR. More specifically, EU member states and EHEA countries should:
 - Address obstacles with regard to additional registration and recognition requirements, e.g. simplifying registration procedures for EQAR registered agencies, allowing exemptions from language requirements and expressing their trust in the accreditation or review decisions by any EQAR registered agency.
 - Create an equal level playing field in terms of cost, e.g. by providing financial support to institutions that want to undergo internationally oriented and recognised quality assurance reviews in those countries where institutions can do reviews with a national agency for free or at reduced fees.
- B. **At European level: the establishment of a European Quality Assurance System should emphasize the importance of institutional accreditation**, giving institutions and programmes the opportunity to develop their own approaches for programme review, including reviews based on subject-specific and internationally recognised standards. Such a system would also simplify the quality assurance and recognition of joint courses and programmes developed in the framework of the European Universities Alliances⁴.

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⁴ A first European Universities Alliance in the area of music & arts has been launched on 1 January 2024 entitled *IN.TUNE – Innovative Universities in Music & Arts in Europe* – see www.intune-alliance.eu.