

# Current Challenges for Quality Assurance: Facilitating Automatic Recognition of Qualifications and Credentials

NCEQE Conference “Higher Education Quality Assurance System  
Reform and Development Prospects”

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# Background – policy



- **European Higher Education Area (Paris Communiqué, 2018)**
  - Quality assurance as one of three key commitments
  - Automatic recognition: “ensure that comparable higher education qualifications obtained in one EHEA country are automatically recognised on the same basis in the others”
- **European Union (Council Recommendation, 2018)**
  - promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education diplomas and the outcomes of learning periods abroad
- **High expectations from quality assurance**

# EHEA Key Commitments



- 1) A Three-Cycle System compatible with the QF-EHEA and scaled by ECTS**
- 2) Compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC)**
- 3) Quality Assurance in conformity with European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)**

Institutions granting degrees assure the quality of their programmes leading to degrees within the three-cycle system following the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG 2015).

External quality assurance (be it at programme or institutional level) is performed by Agencies that have demonstrably complied with the standards and guidelines stipulated in the current ESG. This is best ensured where only those agencies registered on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) are allowed to operate in the country.

# Building blocks of the European quality framework



QF-EHEA	Qualifications Framework: expected learning outcomes for three cycles, ECTS credits
ESG	common standards for quality assurance (QA)
European Approach	specific for QA of joint programmes
EQAR	register of agencies that comply with ESG
DEQAR	HE institutions & programmes quality-assured in line with ESG

# Standards and Guidelines for QA in the EHEA (ESG)



- Common framework for QA
- Developed by stakeholders (E4) and adopted by ministers responsible for higher education
- Initial version 2005, revision adopted 2015
- Three parts:
  - 1) Internal quality assurance
  - 2) External quality assurance
  - 3) Quality assurance agencies

# ESG principles



- 1) HE institutions have primary responsibility for quality
  - Importance of internal quality assurance
- 2) Quality assurance responds to diversity
  - Flexible, fit for purpose methodology
- 3) Support the development of a quality culture
  - Combine accountability & enhancement
- 4) Take into account the needs & expectations of students, all other stakeholders and society
  - Involve stakeholder perspectives
  - Transparency of process and results
  - Independence of quality assurance agencies

# European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR)



## Mission:

Enhance transparency and trust, promote international recognition

## Role:

EHEA's official register of quality assurance agencies that comply with Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG)

- Established by E4 (ENQA, ESU, EUA, ERUASHE), jointly governed with ministries of higher education
- Non-profit and independent
- Acting in the public interest

## Governance of the organisation



## Register Committee

Independent QA experts,  
nominated by stakeholders

Decisions on registration of agencies

# EQAR in practice



Registration based on external review of agency



Annual updates on reviews and countries



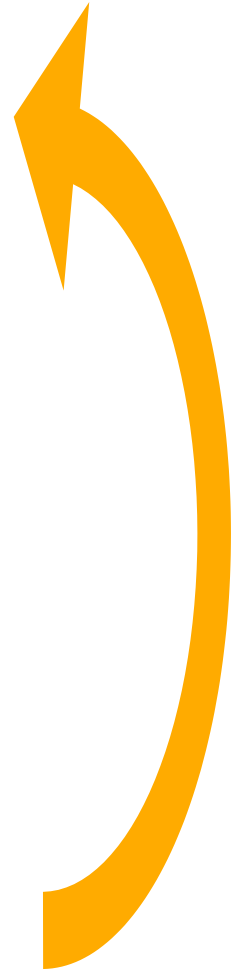
Substantive change reports



Third-party complaints



Periodic renewal every 5 years

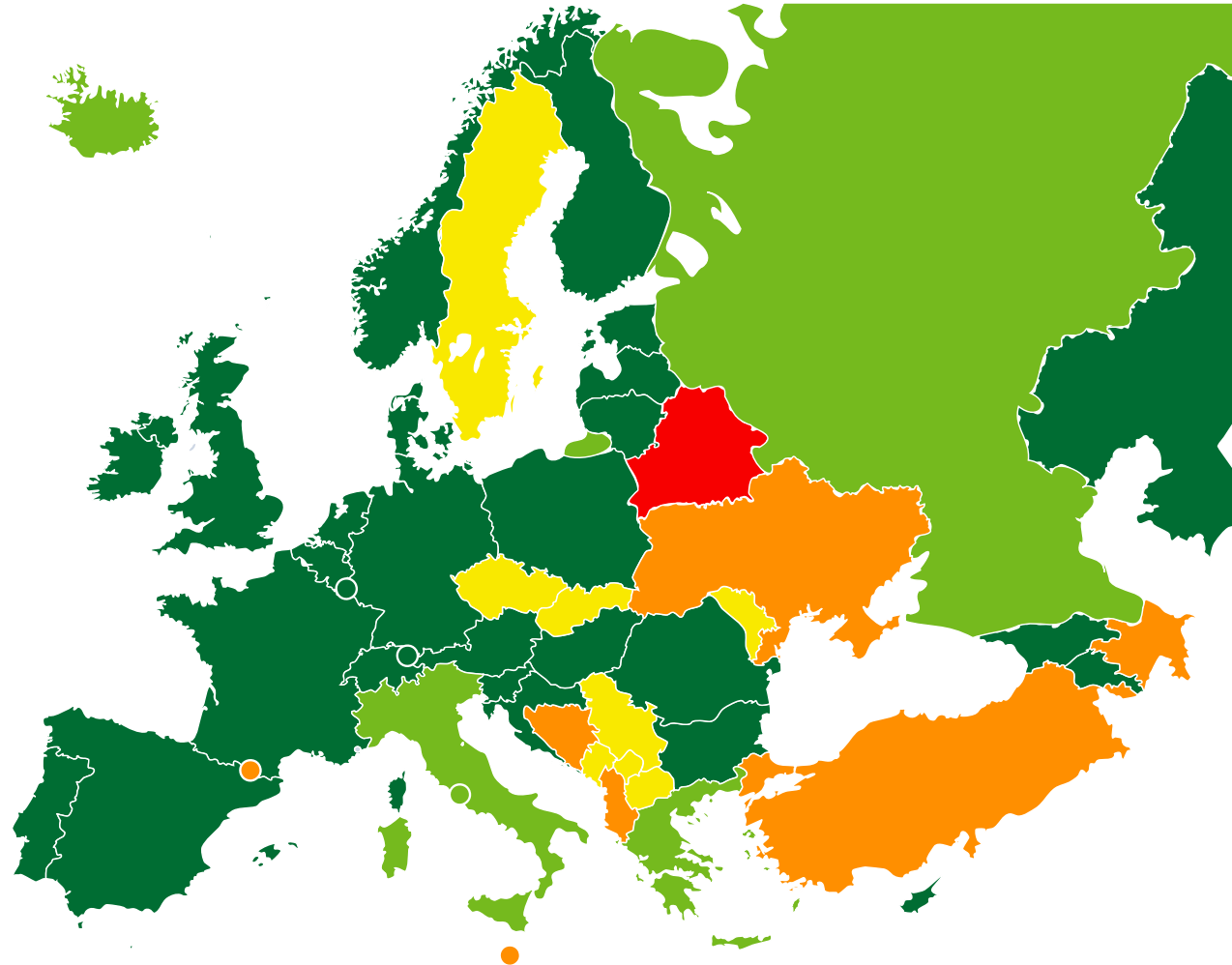




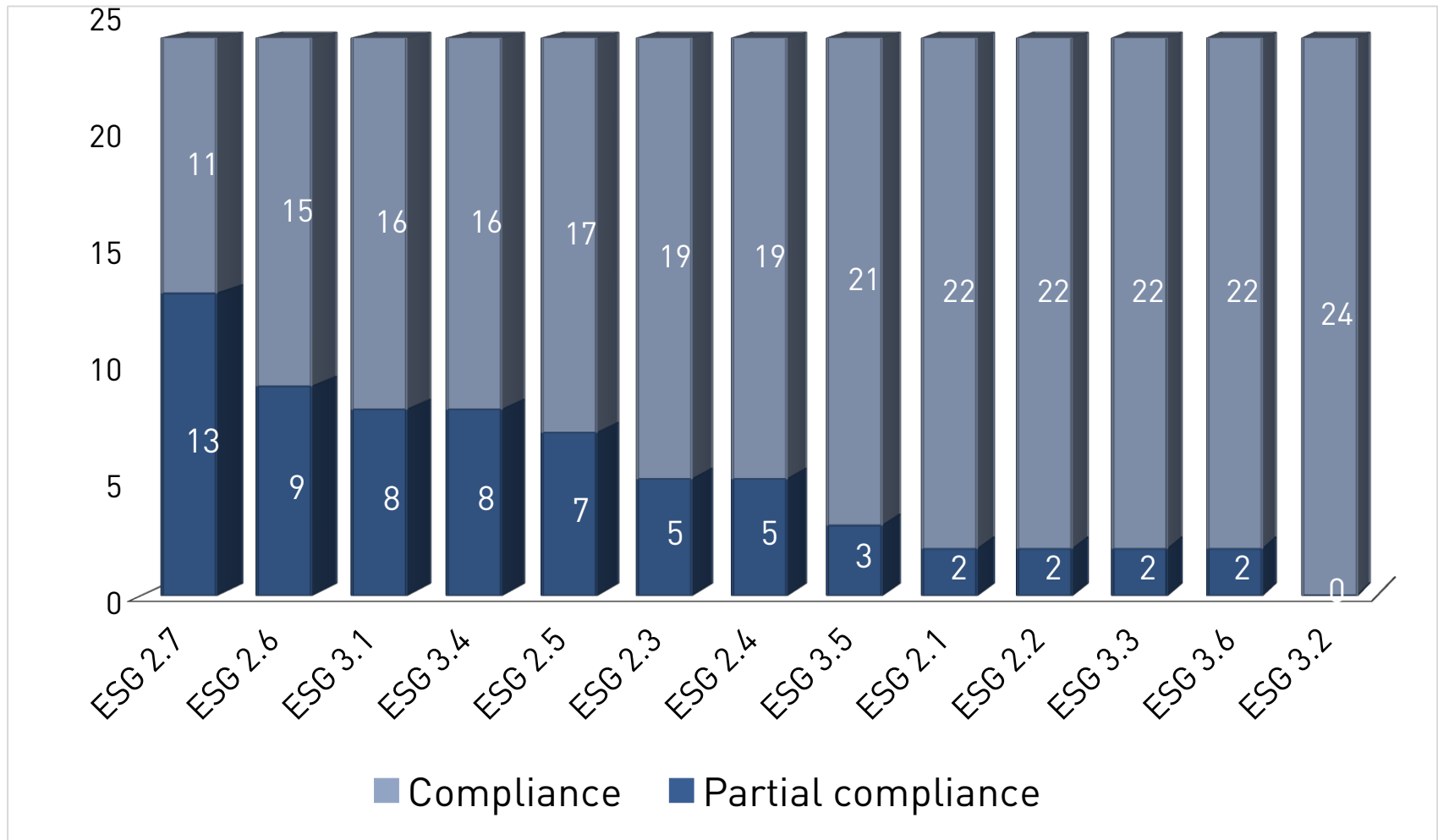
# EHEA Key Commitment – external QA



- 48 QA agencies registered on EQAR
- 28 EHEA countries fully realise commitment



# Which standards are “difficult”?



(based on decisions on 24 applications considered since adoption of the ESG 2015)

... and why?



	Criteria (2.5)	Reporting (2.6)	Appeals (2.7)	Governance (3.1)	Independence (3.3)	Thematic analyses (3.4)
Legal framework does not allow to comply	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Light Blue
Traditions or prevalent (academic) culture	Light Blue	Orange	Light Blue	Orange	Orange	Light Blue
Lack of capacity	Orange	Light Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Orange
Time to adjust to ESG 2015	Light Blue	Light Blue	Orange	Light Blue	Light Blue	Orange
Lack of partnerships with stakeholders	Light Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Orange	Light Blue	Light Blue

# Database of External Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR)



“quality at your fingertips”

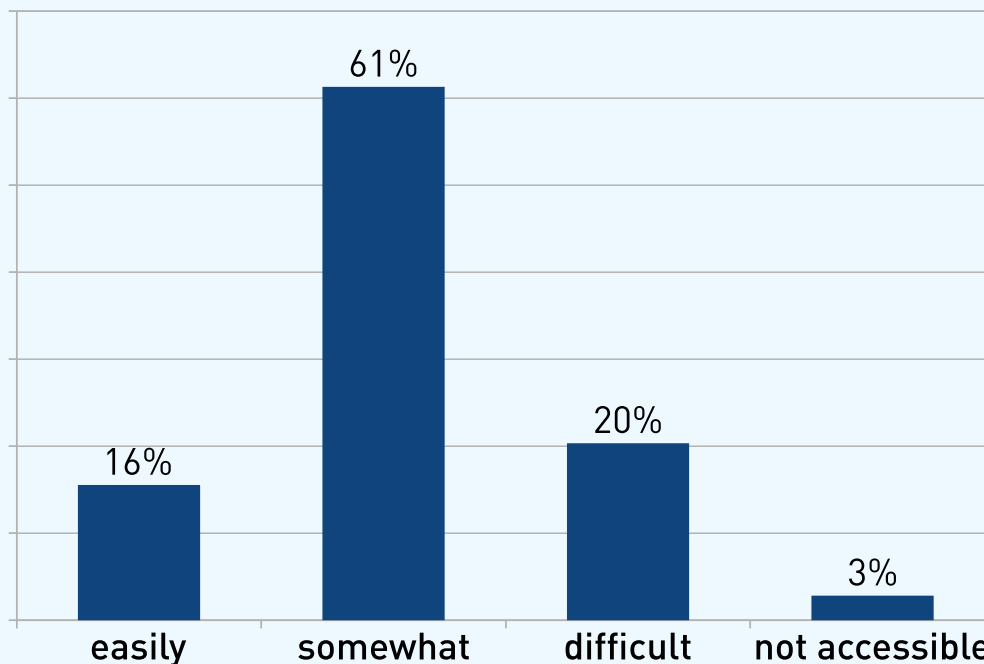
- Easy access to **external quality assurance (QA) reports** and decisions by EQAR-registered agencies
- **Facilitates trust and automatic recognition**, based on robust quality assurance: a qualification from within EHEA, aligned with QF and quality assured in line with ESG, should be recognised without further questions
- Enhance transparency and visibility at the European level

# Access to QA results before DEQAR

## Existing difficulties:

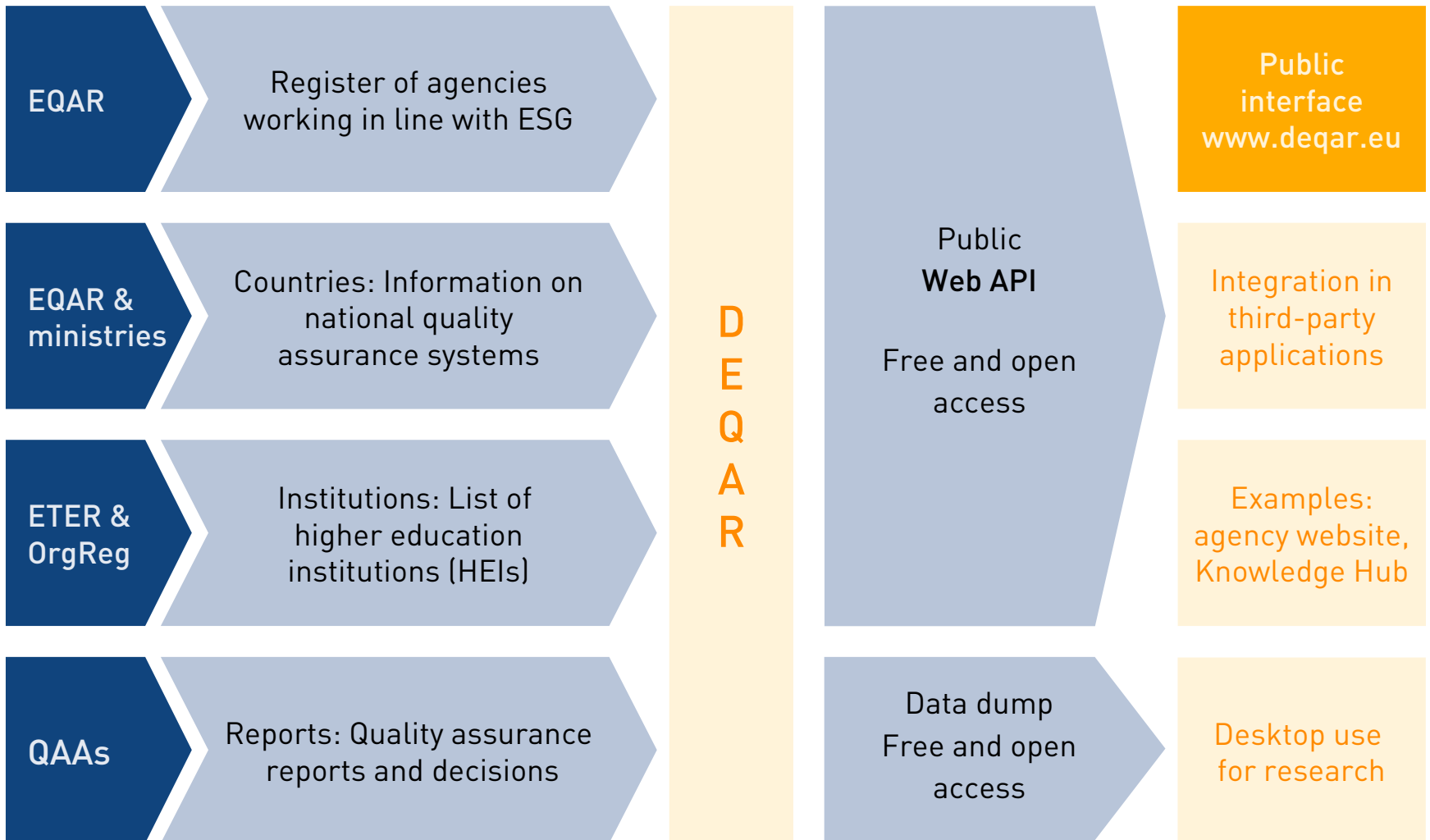
- Which agency?
- User-friendliness of websites
- Language
- Information up-to-date
- Understanding different external QA systems

Do you consider that decisions or reports on external quality assurance of higher education institutions or programmes are currently easy/difficult to access?



Source: EQAR survey of potential users, 2016 (n=384)

# DEQAR system overview



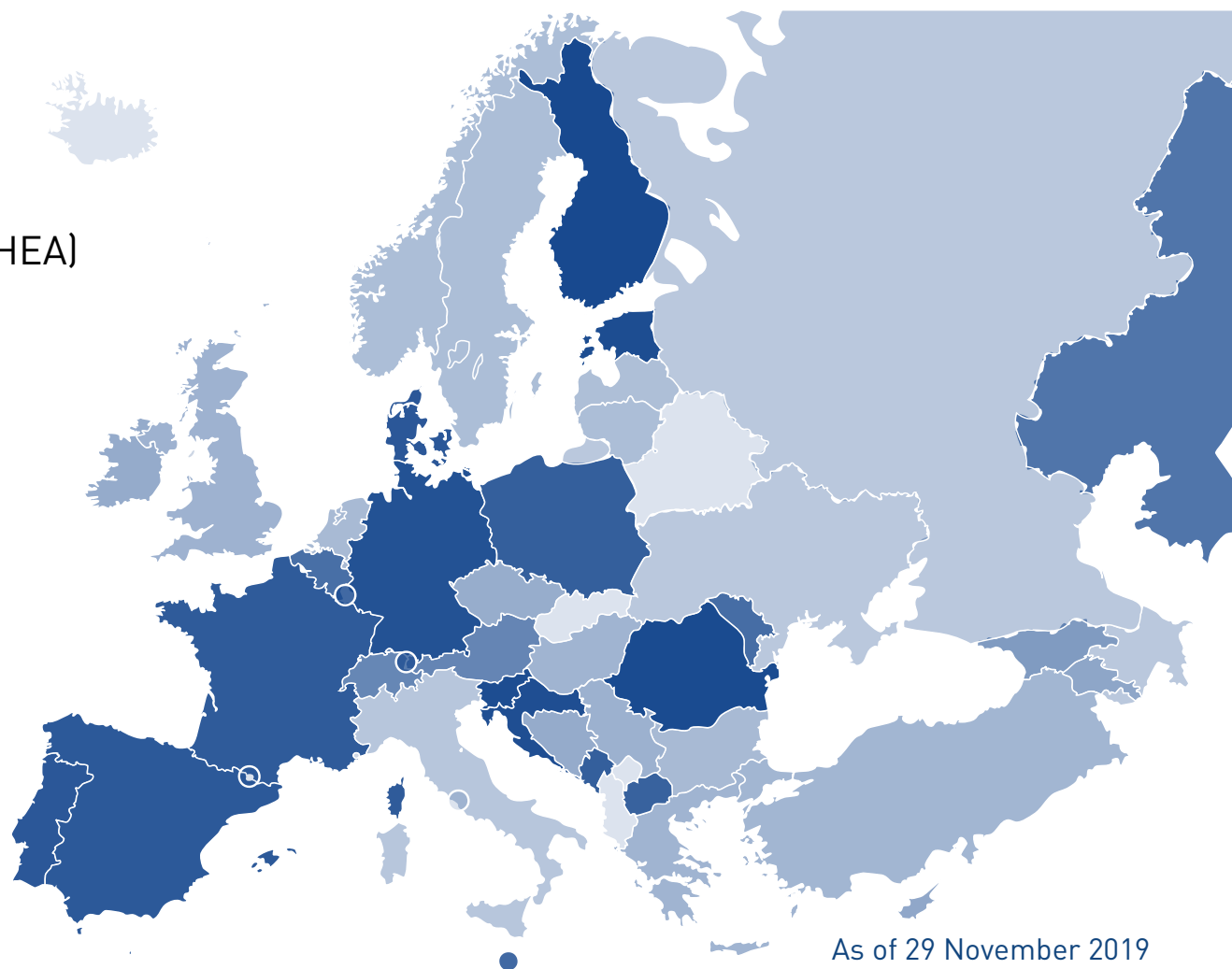
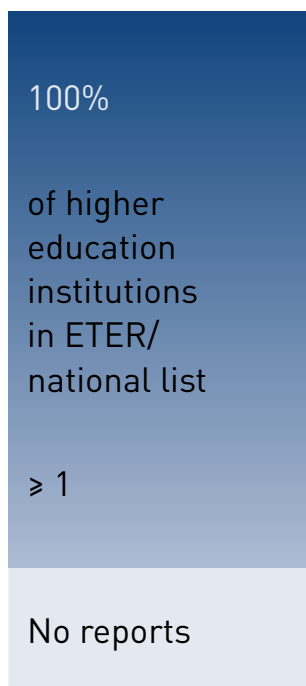
# Coverage



46 974 reports on

2 136 HEIs from  
42 EHEA countries

(+ 66 HEIs from 25 non-EHEA)



As of 29 November 2019

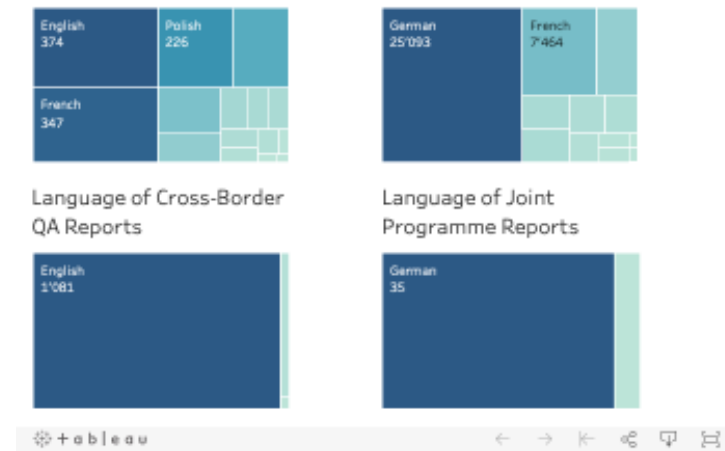
# Infographics

- Improve insights into European QA
- Work in progress, ideas welcome

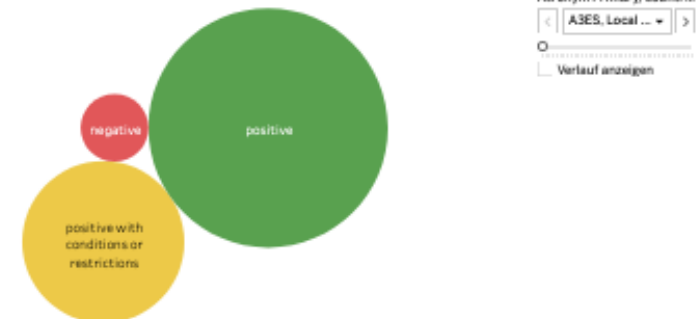
<https://www.eqar.eu/qa-results/infographics/>

# Explainer video

<https://www.eqar.eu/qa-results/deqar-video/>



Report decision - A3ES, Local review





# Trends and challenges



Sustainability, climate change	support innovation in education content
Inclusiveness, accessibility	diversity of learners, provision and providers
Digitalisation of education	adapt QA methodologies
Digitalisation of administration	ensure QA data is open and useful
Micro-credentials	cope with new concepts, new providers

- HEIs are in the lead, QA should follow and not create obstacles

# Scenarios



## ESG, linked with ECTS & QF-EHEA

<b>“Self-accrediting” HEIs (institutional external QA)</b>	<b>HEIs in programme accreditation/QA system</b>	<b>Other providers (e.g. company)</b>
Micro-credentials covered in internal QA	Extend to micro-credentials	Neither too difficult for the more “utilitarian” dimensions: skills, ECTS, EQF level, ...
Probably quite often does not yet (fully) cover m-c	Conceptually not too difficult, plenty out there	Who is eligible?
Institutions need to drive this, not QA (agencies)	<b>Demand-driven or regulatory approach?</b>	What about other issues, e.g. academic freedom, freedom of research, ...  More ?

Need for a “European Approach”? Maybe, but practice need come out of HEIs & QAAs

Thank you. Questions?



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