

The EA Advisory Board: Management review of role, operations and interaction with EA

Strengthened role of the EAAB

The EA Advisory Board (EAAB) was established in November 1998 as EA's main stakeholder and consultative forum. It was created on the initiative of the European Commission to ensure that EA remains responsive to its broad range of stakeholders as an important part of the EU's policy on conformity assessment, which is itself a key component in ensuring the effective operation of the internal market. EA's relations with stakeholders have been reinforced following the adoption of Regulation (EC) 765/2008, which formally requires EA to meet the expectations of stakeholders in European accreditation and to "*establish and maintain appropriate structures to ensure the effective and balanced involvement of all interested parties*".

EAAB Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure

Agreed at the November 1998 meeting, the EAAB *Terms of Reference* (ToR) provide the constitution of the Board, the appointment of its members and its working procedures.

These ToR were amended in October 2004 to include the appointment of a second Vice-Chair with the expectation that the Chair and Vice-Chairs will represent the three main colleges of the Board.

The EAAB ToR and *Rules of Procedure* were revised in April 2009 to align them with new EA's responsibilities towards stakeholders in European accreditation as set out in Regulation (EC) 765/2008.

The last revision of both documents, which are available on the EA website, was made in October 2013 to reflect the latest developments in EA.

Composition of the Board

The EAAB comprises representatives from:

- direct customers (i.e. conformity assessment bodies), indirect customers (e.g. industry, services and trade) and the national authorities, each of them setting up a college composed of five members;

- European consumers organisations, having one seat;
- European standards organisations, having one seat;
- European metrological organisations, having two seats;
- the European Commission and EFTA, having one seat each;
- and EA: EA is represented at the Board by its Chair and Vice-Chair and, since October 2014, its Executive Secretary, as well as occasionally by other members of the EA Executive Committee.

Nominations of members for a three-year term are co-ordinated by the EA Secretariat through a call for nominations launched as defined in the EAAB ToR. In practice, nominations for the three main colleges are co-ordinated by, respectively, the Internal Market for Products (IMP) expert group for the national authorities, BUSINESSEUROPE for the indirect customers, and a joint committee composed of a delegation representing the college of the direct customers.

At its meeting in April 2015, the EAAB had thorough discussions on the representativeness of the Board and confirmed that the existing rules and procedures are still adequate, specifically mentioning that:

- whilst the representativeness of the Board is still considered relevant, efforts should continue to gather representatives from a broader range of organisations and sectors, such as environmental organisations, which directly rely on accredited conformity assessment. It was also agreed to postpone discussions on how to deal with possible requests for representation within the EAAB of scheme owners that have acquired the status of “EA Recognized Stakeholders” until such a request is actually made;
- it is up to the colleges to encourage a broad range of European countries to be represented within the colleges and finally within the EAAB.

Meetings of the Board

The EAAB meets biannually, usually in April-May and October-November, and usually in Brussels, Belgium.

The EA Secretariat, which provides secretariat services for the EAAB as described in the EAAB *Rules of Procedure*, attends the Board’s meetings, taking the minutes of them.

At its meeting in April 2015, the EAAB had discussions about the meetings of the Board and their attendance, and concluded that the existing rules and procedures are still adequate. Specifically:

- there is still a need for biannual physical meetings;
- EAAB members who are unable to attend a meeting should send an apology to the EAAB Secretariat in writing and in advance of the meeting;
- in case of repeated absences of a member, it is up to the concerned college to deal with the situation.

Management of the Board meetings

Each EAAB meeting is preceded by a preparatory meeting, during which the EAAB Chair and Vice-Chairs together with the EA Chair, Vice-Chair and Executive Secretary establish a draft agenda for the meeting. Suggestions from other members of the Board are welcome. This draft agenda is drawn up by the EAAB Secretariat, which distributes it to the whole EAAB membership.

The Board concluded that the “key topic” approach often proved successful with productive discussions on a number of issues, such as for instance,

- the use of accreditation to support notified bodies;
- the way EA should consider the acceptance and evaluation of sector schemes; or
- the improvement of the EA peer-evaluation system.

It is an EA responsibility to ensure that the appropriate strategic issues are tabled. It is the EAAB Chair’s responsibility to ensure that the necessary time for discussion is allocated. On some occasions, the weight of other business implied that there was no time for proper discussion of the key topic(s). On other occasions, it turned out difficult to find suitable topics for strategic discussions of this nature.

Improvements were made in the way how meeting papers are presented in order to ensure that EAAB members know what is expected of them and to steer the discussion. The Board agreed that the practice of categorizing meeting papers as for decision or discussion or information should be continued, including the use of short cover notes to clarify the key points and the input required from the Board.

At its meeting in April 2015, the EAAB expressed its satisfaction with the way in which the Board operates and agreed that:

- the meeting agendas are relevant and the discussions are conducted in a clear and transparent way;
- the meeting agendas’ format with the “key topics for discussion” has proved efficient. There is however no obligation for a “key topic” if there are no suitable issues;
- the meetings are prepared and followed up very well by the EAAB Secretariat.

The board considered cases when an item was on the agenda and, for that item, no document for discussion or decision was prepared in advance. According to the RoP, it is understood that flexibility must exist to allow for issues and papers of specific interest for the Board that come up at the last minute to be dealt with after the closing time.

Achievements in collaboration with EA

The Board has provided valuable advice to EA on a broad range of policy and strategy issues dealing with stakeholder expectations, including:

- EA strategic plans,
- EA membership criteria,
- EA’s relations with the European Commission,
- customer satisfaction,

- status of accreditation,
- cross-border policy,
- policy for sector schemes and new accreditation areas,
- the EA peer-evaluation system,
- a more harmonised approach among EA members
- co-operation with international and other regional accreditation organisations, etc.

EA has been responsive to the Board's advice in many of these areas.

The Board acknowledged that its most effective contribution to EA is at the strategic/political level, on which it should concentrate rather than become involved in questions of technical detail. It is recognised, however, that some more technical issues will be brought to the Board if they cannot be resolved, to the satisfaction of stakeholders, in the technical committees.

Progress has been made in improving the transparency of the interaction between stakeholders and EA. In particular, the successive EAAB Chairs and Vice-Chairs regularly represented the Board at EA General Assembly meetings. Moreover, the Board nominated EAAB HHC and MAC observers in charge of attending the meetings of the EA Horizontal Harmonisation Committee and the EA Multilateral Agreement Council, and of reporting on these meetings at the following EAAB meeting. This was regarded as an important step in increasing the transparency of the interaction process.

Regarding interaction with EA, the Board agreed that:

- communication could be improved if EA provided more timely feedback to the Board's advice;
- the National Authorities College, together with the European Commission, should consider how it could more actively give feedback to the Internal Market of Products (IMP) expert group (including presenting the results of the Board's discussions to that group, and providing feedback to the Board on any reactions or accreditation issues discussed within that group).

EAAB

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