

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* (RoP) were amended in April 2009 to align them with new EA's responsibilities towards stakeholders in European accreditation as set out in Regulation (EC) 765/2008, and later revised to reflect the latest developments in EA.

The last revision of both documents are available on the EA website.

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;
- the European private scheme owners that are EA Recognised Stakeholders, having one seat;
- and EA: EA is represented at the Board by its President and/or Vice-President and, since October 2014, its Executive Secretary, as well as occasionally by other members of the EA Executive Board.

EAAB members are treated by EA as Recognised Stakeholders of right.

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, called CAB College.

At the meetings held in November 2022 and May 2023, 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:

- Whereas the representativeness of the Board is still considered relevant in 2024, efforts should continue to gather representatives from a broad range of organisations and sectors, which directly rely on accredited conformity assessment. At the meeting in May 2019, further agreement was reached on the request for representation within the EAAB of scheme owners that have acquired the status of EA recognized stakeholders by granting them one seat on the board to appoint one representative as a member of the Board.
- 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. At its meeting in October 2023, the Board decided to hold the spring EAAB meetings in a hybrid manner in Brussels and the autumn meetings exclusively remotely.

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 May 2023, 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 meeting; the Board agreed to hold the spring EAAB meetings in a hybrid manner in Brussels and the autumn meetings exclusively remotely.

- EAAB members who are unable to attend should send an apology to the EAAB Secretariat in writing in advance to the convened meeting date; they may be represented by proxy by another Member.
- In the event of repeated absence by a member, it is the responsibility of the concerned college to deal with the matter.

At the EAAB meeting in November 2022, it had been agreed that the EAAB Chair and Vice-Chairs and the EA President and Executive Secretary would meet once in-between the two annual meetings of the Board in order to improve the communication and interaction between the EAAB and EA.

Management of the Board meetings

Each EAAB meeting is preceded by a preparatory meeting, during which the EAAB Chair and/or Vice-Chairs together with the EA President and/or Vice-President 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 for distribution to the EAAB membership.

The Board concluded that the “key topic” approach often proved successful with productive discussions related to key matters, for instance:

- the use of accreditation to support notified bodies;
- the improvement of the EA peer-evaluation system; or
- the challenges for the conformity assessment infrastructure posed by new EU legislation for new technologies (Artificial Intelligence, Cybersecurity, Sustainability).

It is an EA responsibility to ensure that the appropriate strategic matters are tabled. It is the EAAB Chair’s responsibility to ensure that the sufficient time for discussion is allocated. Due consideration is to be given when on occasion, the weight of business provides insufficient time to cover all the key topic(s). Likewise, when a specific topic warrants the extended time, it shall be given.

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.

At its meeting in May 2023, 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 manner;
- 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 matters to discuss;
- 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

As reflected in the EAAB work programme, 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 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:

- the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the EAAB should have an additional in-between meeting together with the EA President and the EA Executive Secretary to follow up on the conclusions and resolutions agreed by the Board and the related actions taken by EA, and to discuss current issues of relevance to the Board and the stakeholders which should not be postponed until the next full meeting of the Board;
- transparency of the work of EA, and therefore involvement of the EAAB, could be improved if EA ensured a relevant access of the Board to the documents published on the EA intranet;
- the National Authorities College, together with the European Commission, should consider how it could more actively give feedback to the Internal Market of Products - Expert Group

for Accreditation and Conformity Assessment Policy (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

Revised in May 2024