

What to expect - main stages of the review process

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DEVELOPMENT
PLAN 2020



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Support for Meeting the Requirements Set for EQAR Agency, Nr.8.2.4.0/15/l/001

Purpose of the review

ENQA membership

An external review against the ESG is a prerequisite to become a member of ENQA/for renewal of ENQA membership (**every 5 years**).

To be eligible, the agency should have been operational in quality assurance for at least **2 years** and should have completed at least **5 review reports**.

ENQA may also coordinate ESG compliance reviews of agencies which do not wish to or cannot apply for ENQA membership, such as QA agencies outside the EHEA.

EQAR registration

An external review against the ESG is also a requirement for agencies wishing to apply to the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

Purpose of the review

Enhancement and development

an external review provides feedback to improve the agency's processes and activities

Remit of the review

- ✓ **The first ESG review:** specific attention to the **policies, procedures,** and **criteria in place**. Full evidence of concrete results in all areas may not be available at this stage e.g. completed reports of thematic analyses. However, the agency must be able to document (as in action plans with timetables) how they are able to achieve results according to all standards by the next review.
- ✓ **The second (and subsequent) review:** clear evidence of results in all areas. Further reviews will need to acknowledge **progress** from the previous review - mandatory element in both the SAR and the panel report.

Main stages of the review process

Initial stage

- ✓ **Request:** review is initiated by a request from an agency that wants to be granted or to renew ENQA membership. Free format letter including the following:
 - *when SAR would be ready (approximately 4 months before the site visit);*
 - *period (month) when the agency wishes the site visit to take place;*
 - *whether the agency is also (re)applying for registration on EQAR.*

Request addressed to the ENQA Board but **sent to the Secretariat.**

- ✓ **Coordinator:** each review is assigned to an ENQA Secretariat staff member who will act as the review coordinator. This person serves as the main contact person for the agency and the review panel throughout the process and will support all those involved during the different stages. Agency should also assign its **contact person** for the review.

Initial stage

- ✓ **Terms of reference (ToR)**: ENQA and the agency agree on the Terms of Reference of the review, including the **activities** to be subjected to the review as well as the **overall timeline**.
- ✓ **EQAR Eligibility Confirmation** (if applicable): agencies also wishing to apply to EQAR will need to contact EQAR prior to the finalisation of the ToR and thus before the formal start of the actual review process.

Stage I: before the site visit

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- ✓ **Review panel:** coordinator composes the review panel which is approved by the ENQA Board in accordance with ENQA policy. The agency is always given the opportunity to comment on the selected panel members and signal any possible **conflicts of interest** or biases.

At least **4** external reviewers, including:

- one or two **quality assurance professionals** (at least one currently employed by a QA agency and both having been engaged in QA within the past 5 years)
- **academic** at a higher education institution
- **student**

When requested or when considered particularly pertinent, other stakeholders e.g. **representative of the labour market** may be included instead of the second quality assurance professional or in addition to the four panel members.

- ❑ All panel members must have been **trained by ENQA**.
- ❑ At least **2** panel members from **outside the national system** of the agency.
- ❑ The review chair and the review secretary may not come from the same country
- ❑ The review chair should not come from the country of the agency under review
- ❑ At least one member has good **knowledge and understanding of the higher education and quality assurance system** in which the agency (predominantly) operates.
- ❑ At least one panel member has **fluent knowledge of the main working language** of the agency and/or the language of the country in which the agency (predominantly) operates.
- ❑ **Gender balance** is taken into consideration. A panel never has only male or only female members.
- ❑ No current nor former members (last five years) of staff of the agency under review can take part in the review panel.
- ❑ Current members of the ENQA Board are not eligible to serve as reviewers in ENQA Agency Reviews.
- ❑ The review chair will have **previous experience** taking part in an ENQA Agency Review.
- ❑ The review secretary will normally have previous experience taking part in an ENQA Agency Review.
- ❑ Whenever possible, at least one panel member will **not have previously participated** in an ENQA Agency Review.



Stage I: before the site visit

- ✓ **Self assessment report (SAR):** agency submits its SAR (around 40-60 pages in length excluding annexes) + any other documentation of relevance (annexes). It is important that SAR provides **clear information**, **sufficient reflections**, **critique**, and **analysis**.

“We do not learn from experience...
we learn from reflecting on experience.”
— John Dewey

- The review coordinator carries out a **pre-screening of the SAR** to ensure it meets the requirements;
- Agency is given **2 weeks** to provide the Secretariat with a revised SAR;
- Agency **publishes** the completed SAR on its website.

Stage I: before the site visit

- ✓ **Additional documents:** further documents may be requested from the agency prior to the site visit by the panel.

- ✓ **Practical arrangements:**
 - the review secretary will liaise with the agency's contact person to set up the **schedule** of the site visit;
 - the agency invites its **stakeholders** to the meetings with the panel (up to 6 people per meeting);
 - **Interpreters** – external to the agency's operations;
 - the review coordinator will be in touch with the agency's contact person to discuss other **practical arrangements** (hotels, transportation, meals etc.)

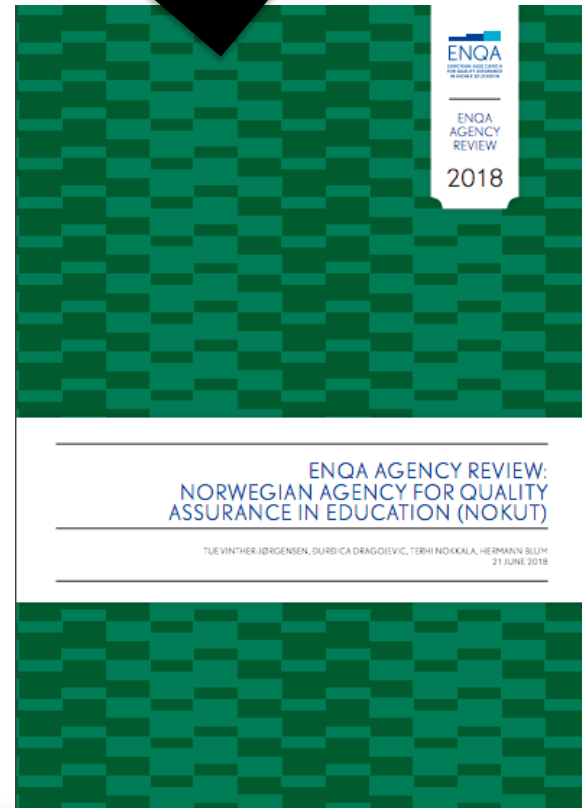
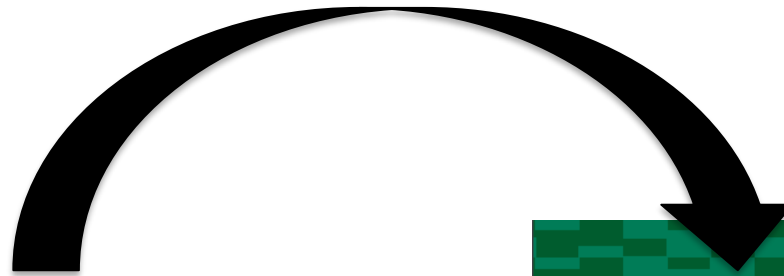
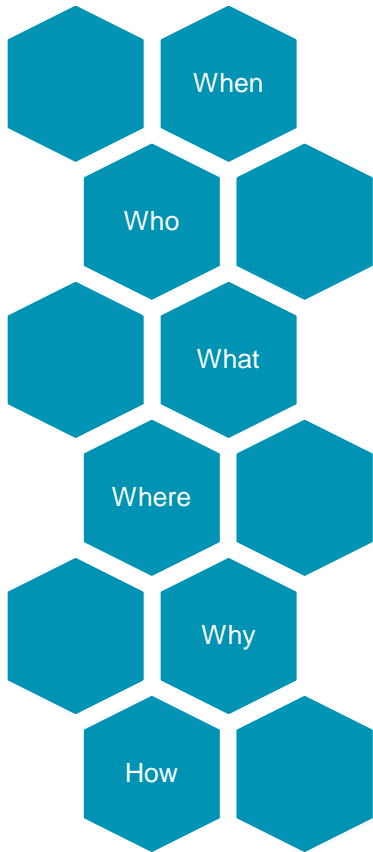
Stage II: site visit

- ✓ **Meeting with agency's resource person** (if requested by panel): to clarify elements related to the **overall system and context**, to save time during the interview sessions (1h session during the panel's pre-meeting).

- ✓ **Site visit** (usually 2.5 days; conducted in English): the panel validates information in the SAR, as well as clarifies any points at issue.
 - **Interviews** with the agency's personnel and stakeholders
 - Final de-briefing meeting - immediate feedback/**overall impressions**

N.B. No information can be provided **after the site visit.**

Stage III: review report



Stage III: review report

- ✓ **Draft**: review secretary is in charge of providing the first post-visit draft. All panel members carefully read and comment on the draft.
- ✓ **Pre-screening by coordinator**: finalised draft is sent to the coordinator to verify its compliance with the Guidelines.
- ✓ **Factual accuracy**: report (with the judgements on compliance) is submitted to the agency for comments on factual accuracy – errors of fact/grave misunderstandings only (**2 weeks** for comments).
- ✓ **Final report**: final version is submitted by the review chair to the ENQA Secretariat for the attention of the Board. It is also sent to the agency, however, the report is to be considered **final** only **after being approved** by the ENQA Board.

Stage IV: decision making

- ✓ **Letter:** agency submits a letter explaining its motivation for applying for/requesting to renew its membership – how the agency will contribute to the work and objectives of ENQA during membership.
- ✓ **Scrutiny of the report:** to facilitate its decision making, the ENQA Board relies on the support of Review Committees for the initial scrutiny of the report.
- ✓ **Decision:** ENQA Board takes a decision on the basis of the final report and the scrutiny by the Review Committee.

The ENQA Board is not, however, obliged to follow the recommendations of the review panel nor of the Review Committee. The Board makes its decision in light of the gathered evidence.

When the agency also applies for registration on EQAR, the same review report will be used by the EQAR Register Committee for its separate decision.

Stage IV: decision making

Possible outcomes of the Board's decision:

1. The agency is considered to be **in substantial compliance** with the ESG and is admitted/reconfirmed as a member of ENQA.

2. The agency is considered as **not substantially compliant** with the ESG:
 - A. **New applicants:** The minimum period before a next review after an unsuccessful one is **2 years**. Recommendations and areas to be addressed before a new review.

 - B. **Current members:** a “**Member under review**”. 2 years to make the necessary changes to reach a sufficient level of compliance and undergo an additional **partial review** to verify progress in the end of this period.

Stage V: follow-up

- ✓ **Follow-up report:** agency is requested to submit a follow-up report within 2 years of the Board's positive decision on membership. This may be reduced to 1 year in cases where urgent action is considered necessary.
- ✓ **Progress visit:** additional service, non-investigative nature. **Voluntary** progress visit is aimed to generate a stronger enhancement-oriented dialogue and to support development. In about **2 years after the completion of the review** process, usually by 2 experts from the original panel (when possible).



Thank you!

