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Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA)  
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Brussels, 2 April 2024

**Subject: Statement on validation of the external review report of MFHEA**

Dear Dr. Franky Abela,

I am pleased to inform you that, at its meeting on 26 March 2024, the ENQA Agency Review Committee validated the external review report of MFHEA. The committee concluded that the report has been produced in accordance with the Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews and can thus be used to apply for ENQA membership, as well as for any other purposes. This is in line with article 26, paragraph 2 of ENQA's Rules of Procedure, which states that the review report can be further used only once this statement of validation has been issued. The purpose of this statement is to set out the committee's views on the quality of the final report and consistency of the panel's evaluation on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

The committee examined the provided review report and asked the panel for further information relating to the standards 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 2.1, and 2.4 of the ESG.

The committee received the final review report that addressed the additional requirements. The final review report can thus be further used to apply for ENQA membership and EQAR registration, as well as for any other purposes, as stipulated above.

This statement will be published on ENQA's website as an annex to the review report.

Thank you for your trust placed in ENQA to conduct this review. If you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact the ENQA Secretariat.

Yours sincerely,



Mr. Alastair Delaney  
Chair of ENQA Agency Review Committee

Annex: Areas for development

## **Annex: Areas for development**

As outlined by the review panel and further discussed by the committee (where relevant), MFHEA is recommended to take appropriate action, in so far as it is empowered to do so, on the following issues:

### **ESG 3.1 Activities, policy, and processes for quality assurance**

The panel urges the agency to reconsider and map all activities in a clear and comprehensive manner for better understanding of the landscape to any user of the agency's services.

Have a clear and accessible distinction of higher education and non-higher education activities to improve internal organisation and external communication.

Goals and objectives of the agency should be established explicitly and communicated clearly to assure guidance of the agency's daily work.

Reflect on the EQA system by reorganising the procedures thus decreasing its complexity and not to overburden the HEIs.

### **ESG 3.3 Independence**

The role of the QAC and the Board should be further clarified and clearly communicated in all accreditation procedures and formal outcomes.

Ensure changes in composition of the Board by not including any members, including the Head of the QAC, to eliminate conflicts of interest.

### **ESG 3.4 Thematic analysis**

Have a plan to ensure thematic analysis regularly and expand its thematic analysis activities with a specific focus on HE and HEIs.

Take a hands-on approach in thematic analysis, emphasising internal involvement over outsourcing to external evaluators, in order to foster a more nuanced and context-specific analysis.

### **ESG 3.5 Resources**

Map the ongoing procedures and relative workload taking into account the possible expansion of the higher education system in the short to medium term.

Prioritise and implement robust staff development opportunities, essential for both individual and organisational growth, ensuring the retention and continual enhancement of expertise within the agency.

### **ESG 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct**

Foster and promote the internal quality culture by making existing processes more visible within the QA system for enhanced clarity and shared understanding.

Assess its external feedback mechanisms, aiming to elaborate input from stakeholders that enhances continuous improvement.

### **ESG 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance**

Consider incorporating the standards referenced in the NQAF into documents pertaining to provider and program accreditation for improved transparency and alignment.

Enhance the depth of addressing IQA system efficiency and effectiveness within EQA activities to minimise ambiguity and ensure comprehensive coverage of necessary standards for safeguarding quality of higher education.

Ensure that in the application form for programme accreditation and in the upcoming methodology for programme accreditation all relevant standards of Part I of the ESG are clearly integrated.

### **ESG 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose**

Distinctly separate accreditation for further education providers and higher education programmes and emphasise research in accreditation of HEIs.

The key elements of higher education as prescribed through the relevant standards should be evaluated consistently in the agency's EQA activities to safeguard and further support the Maltese higher education sector. This is particularly relevant for the agency's external quality assurance procedures on study programmes, where the coverage of all standards is not guaranteed, and of the provider accreditation of other HEIs with the lack of clarity of the academics being involved in the process.

A clearer line to be made on the provision of support to higher education institutions during programme accreditation versus an external evaluation in the agency's activities (particularly programme accreditation and the related cycles).

### **ESG 2.3 Implementing processes**

Ensure that processes for provider and programme accreditation and the information found in relation to these EQA activities are concise, consistent and easy to understand for relevant stakeholders and fit for purpose to safeguard quality.

Streamline and systematise processes, particularly those associated with the three main accreditation procedures, considering a simplification by grouping and integrating them more clearly into the agency's QA system for enhanced coherence and understanding.

Ensure the methodology for provider and programme accreditation including requirement for a SAR and the site visits for all HEIs is clear and consistently applied.

Follow-up to the agency EQA activities can be considered as such only after the agency's decision on these activities. Thus, the agency should develop follow-up processes for programme accreditation and ensure that follow-up procedure is implemented for all provider accreditation.

Establish and communicate follow-up procedures after the finalisation of reports and decisions to ensure continuous improvement.

Introduce the policy and following processes to monitor accreditation periods of programmes accredited by other agencies.

Ensure consistency of information provided on the website and easily comprehended and followed, for each EQA process of the agency.

#### **ESG 2.4 Peer-review experts**

Ensure that there is student participation in all EQA processes related to higher education.

Deliver distinct training for students covering accreditation standards and their role in external evaluation, while revising guidelines for full student engagement.

Organise a structured and transparent recruiting system for peer experts especially for provider accreditation, in which the different profiles are clearly defined.

Selection criteria for being enrolled in the pool of experts for conducting EQA and programme reviews should be predefined, clearly communicated, and capable of ensuring peer review.

Include assessment by peer-review panels in case of provider accreditation.

For online providers and programmes, the assessment carried out by the digital reviewer should be integrated into an assessment of the pedagogical and methodological aspects required for distance teaching and learning.

#### **ESG 2.5 Criteria for outcomes**

For each accreditation procedure the criteria followed to reach the final decision should be clearly established.

Ensure the publication and communication of all EQA criteria of outcomes for each accreditation procedure to enhance transparency and ensure consistency in decision making.

Should extend the practice applied for consolidation of panel report for MQF level 8 to MQF levels 6 and 7.



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### **ESG 2.6 Reporting**

Ensure that the outcomes for each EQA activity of the agency in the scope of the ESG are made public and that all the reports are published together with the decisions. All provider accreditation reports, not just those for university status, should be published.

Ensure that officers of the agency provide necessary guidance to the panel in preparation of the consolidated report but are not directly involved in its preparation.

Ensure that all decisions are published together with the reports.