

External review of the National Entity for Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education (NEAQA) by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE

May 2019

1. Background and context

The National Entity for Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education (NEAQA) is an independent agency in Serbia, established in 2018, for the purpose of quality enhancement of higher education institutions and study programs. According to the previous Law on Education the Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA) was founded in 2006 as the central body for accreditation and quality assurance in Serbia until the new Law of Education of 2017. NEAQA provides the legal, institutional, substantial and functional continuity with the previous institution. As a new independent legal entity NEAQA is consisted of Managing Board, Director, Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA), and Professional and Administrative Service.

By virtue of the Law of Higher Education NEAQA is responsible for performing the accreditation tasks, the assessment of quality of higher education institutions and the units therein, evaluation of study programs and assurance of quality in higher education. In realizing those goals CAQA is an expert / professional body of NEAQA who decides on the requests for accreditation, conducts the accreditation procedure and the procedure of external quality evaluation upon opinion of five peer review experts. The Director of the NEAQA appoints peer -review experts upon the proposal by CAQA.

Working plan of NEAQA is focused on promotion of higher education in Serbia through ensuring its compliance with the internationally recognized accreditation and quality assurance standards. The planned activities will be performed in the process of accreditation and quality assurance in accordance with the quality principles in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) and the regulations in the Republic of Serbia.

In the process of preparation for the new cycle of accreditation, new procedures were adopted and published on 28 February 2019 in accordance with the requirements of ESG and the Law on higher education of the Republic of Serbia. The new procedure changed the accreditation system regarding the role of the peer reviewers, as suggested by ENQA and EQAR report about CAQA/NEAQA. The new CAQA had to review around 350 requests for accreditation which were left from the previous CAQA. During this process CAQA has noted numerous and various shortcomings, informed the academic community about these findings and established cooperation with it in order to overcome the shortcomings. CAQA informed the National Council for Higher Education¹ (NCHE) about the shortage of international peer-reviewers necessary for the review of Ph.D. study programmes and NCHE decided to keep the call for experts open constantly. Moreover, the members of NCHE and CAQA took the obligation to spread the information about the call among the international academic community. The call is published on NCHE website in two languages: Serbian and English.

NEAQA has been ENQA member under review since 22 February 2018 (the predecessor organization CAQA - Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance) and is now applying for ENQA

¹ In charge for the creation of the list of peer reviewers

membership. The review will also be used for the agency's application for registration on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

2. Purpose and scope of the evaluation

This review will evaluate the way in which and to what extent NEAQA fulfils the requirements of *the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*. Consequently, the review will provide information to the ENQA Board to aid its consideration of whether membership of NEAQA should be confirmed and to EQAR to support NEAQA application to the register.

The review panel is not expected, however, to make any judgements as regards granting membership.

2.1 Activities of NEAQA within the scope of the ESG

In order for NEAQA to apply for ENQA membership and for registration in EQAR, this review will analyse all NEAQA activities that are within the scope of the ESG, i.e. reviews, audits, evaluations or accreditation of higher education institutions or programmes that relate to teaching and learning (and their relevant links to research and innovation). This is regardless of whether these activities are carried out within or outside the EHEA, and whether they are obligatory or voluntary.

The following activities of NEAQA have to be addressed in the external review:

- Accreditation on Higher Education Institutions
- Accreditation of Study Programmes
- External quality evaluation
- Initial accreditation of HEIs and study programmes

3. The review process

The process is designed in line with the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and the requirements of the *EQAR Procedures for Applications*.

The evaluation procedure consists of the following steps:

- Formulation of the Terms of Reference for the review;
- Nomination and appointment of the review panel;
- Self-assessment by NEAQA including the preparation and publication of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit by the review panel to NEAQA;
- Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report by the review panel;
- Scrutiny of the final evaluation report by the ENQA Review Committee;
- Analysis of the scrutiny by the ENQA Board and their decision regarding ENQA membership;
- Follow-up of the panel's and/or ENQA Board's recommendations by the agency, including a voluntary progress visit.

3.1 Nomination and appointment of the review team members

The review panel consists of four members: one or two quality assurance experts (at least one of which is currently employed by an ENQA member agency), an academic employed by a higher education institution, a student member, and eventually a labour market representative (if requested). One of the members will serve as the Chair of the review panel, and another member as a review Secretary. For ENQA Agency Reviews at least one of the reviewers is an ENQA nominee (most often the QA professional[s]). At least one of the reviewers is appointed from the nominees of either the European

University Association (EUA) or the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), and the student member is always selected from among the ESU-nominated reviewers. If requested, the labour market representative may come from the Business Europe nominees or from ENQA. An additional panel member may be included in the panel at the request of the agency under review. In this case an additional fee to cover the reviewer's fee and travel expenses is applied.

In addition to the four members, the panel will be supported by the ENQA Secretariat review coordinator who will monitor the integrity of the process and ensure that ENQA's requirements are met throughout the process. The ENQA staff member will not be the Secretary of the review and will not participate in the discussions during the site visit interviews.

Current members of the ENQA Board are not eligible to serve as reviewers.

ENQA will provide NEAQA with the list of suggested experts with their respective curriculum vitae to establish that there are no known conflicts of interest. The experts will have to sign a non-conflict of interest statement as regards NEAQA review.

3.2 Self-assessment by NEAQA, including the preparation of a self-assessment report

NEAQA is responsible for the execution and organisation of its own self-assessment process and shall take into account the following guidance:

- Self-assessment is organised as a project with a clearly defined schedule and includes all relevant internal and external stakeholders;
- The self-assessment report is broken down by the topics of the evaluation and is expected to contain, among others: a brief description of the national HE and QA system; background description of the current situation of the Agency; an analysis and appraisal of the current situation; proposals for improvement and measures already planned; a SWOT analysis; each criterion (ESG part II and III) addressed individually. All agency's QA activities (whether within their national jurisdiction or outside of it, and whether obligatory or voluntary) will be described and their compliance with the ESG analysed.
- The report is well-structured, concise and comprehensively prepared. It clearly demonstrates the extent to which NEAQA fulfils its tasks of external quality assurance and meets the ESG and thus the requirements of ENQA membership.
- The self-assessment report is submitted to the ENQA Secretariat who has 4 weeks to pre-scrutinise it before forwarding the report to the panel of experts. The purpose of the pre-scrutiny is to ensure that the self-assessment report is satisfactory for the consideration of the panel. The Secretariat will not judge the content of information itself but whether the necessary information, as stated in the Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews, is present. For the second and subsequent reviews, the agency is expected to enlist the recommendations provided in the previous review and to outline actions taken to meet these recommendations. In case the self-assessment report does not contain the necessary information and fails to respect the requested form and content, the ENQA Secretariat reserves the right to reject the report and ask for a revised version within two weeks. In such cases, an additional fee of 1000 EUR will be charged to the agency.
- The report is submitted to the review panel a minimum of six weeks prior to the site visit.

3.3 A site visit by the review panel

The review panel will draw up a draft proposal of the schedule for the site visit to be submitted to the agency at least two months before the planned dates of the visit. The schedule includes an indicative timetable of the meetings and other exercises to be undertaken by the review panel during the site

visit, the duration of which is usually 2,5 days. The approved schedule shall be given to NEAQA at least one month before the site visit, in order to properly organise the requested interviews.

The review panel will be assisted by NEAQA in arriving in Belgrade, Serbia.

The site visit will close with a final de-briefing meeting outlining the panel's overall impressions but not its judgement on the ESG compliance of the agency, or the granting or reconfirmation of ENQA membership.

3.4 Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report

On the basis of the review panel's findings, the review Secretary will draft the report in consultation with the review panel. The report will take into account the purpose and scope of the evaluation as defined under articles 2 and 2.1. It will also provide a clear rationale for its findings with regards to each ESG. A draft will be first submitted to the ENQA review coordinator who will check the report for consistency, clarity and language and it will be then submitted to NEAQA within 10 weeks of the site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If NEAQA chooses to provide a statement in reference to the draft report it will be submitted to the Chair of the review panel within two weeks after the receipt of the draft report. Thereafter the review panel will take into account the statement by NEAQA, will finalise the document and submit it to ENQA.

The report is to be finalised within three months of the site visit and will not exceed 40 pages in length.

When preparing the report, the review panel should also bear in mind the *EQAR Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG*, so as to ensure that the report will contain sufficient information for the Register Committee for application to EQAR.

For the purpose of applying for ENQA membership, NEAQA is also requested to provide a letter addressed to the ENQA Board outlining its motivation to apply for membership and the ways in which NEAQA expects to contribute to the work and objectives of ENQA during its membership. This letter will be taken into consideration by the ENQA Board, together with the final evaluation report, when deciding on the agency's membership.

4. Follow-up process and publication of the report

NEAQA will consider the expert panel's report and will publish it on its website once the ENQA Board has made its decision. The report will also be published on the ENQA website, regardless of the review outcome and decision by the ENQA Board. NEAQA commits to preparing a follow-up plan in which it addresses the recommendations of the review panel and to submitting a follow-up report to the ENQA Board within the timeframe indicated in the Board's decision on membership. The follow-up report will be published on the ENQA website, in addition to the full review report and the Board's decision.

The follow-up report will be complemented by a small-scale progress visit to the agency performed by two members of the original panel (whenever possible). This visit will be used to discuss issues, based on the ESG, considered as of particular importance or challenge to NEAQA. Its purpose is entirely developmental and has no impact on the judgement of membership and/or judgement of compliance of the agency with the ESG. Should the agency not wish to take advantage of this opportunity, it may opt out by informing the ENQA Review Coordinator about this.

5. Use of the report

ENQA shall retain ownership of the report. The intellectual property of all works created by the expert panel in connection with the review contract, including specifically any written reports, shall be vested in ENQA.

The review report is used by the Board of ENQA for the purpose of reaching a conclusion on whether NEAQA is in compliance with the ESG and can be thus admitted/reconfirmed as a member of ENQA. The report will also be used for registration on EQAR and is designed to serve these two purposes. However, the review report is to be considered final only after being approved by the ENQA Board. Once submitted to NEAQA and ENQA and until it is approved by the Board the report may not be used or relied upon by NEAQA, the panel, or any third party and may not be disclosed without the prior written consent of ENQA. NEAQA may use the report at its discretion only after the Board has approved of the report. The approval of the report is independent of the decision on membership.

The Chair of the panel shall remain available to respond to questions of clarification or further information from the EQAR Register Committee provided that the ENQA Secretariat is copied in all such requests.

6. Budget

NEAQA shall pay the following review related fees:

Fee of the Chair	4,500 EUR
Fee of the Secretary	4,500 EUR
Fee of the 2 other panel members	4,000 EUR (2,000 EUR each)
Fee of 2 panel members for progress visit	1,000 EUR (500 EUR each)
Administrative overhead for ENQA Secretariat	7,000 EUR
Experts Training fund	1,400 EUR
Approximate travel and subsistence expenses	6,000 EUR
Travel and subsistence expenses progress visit	1,600 EUR

This gives a total indicative cost of 30,000.00 EUR VAT excl. for a review team of 4 members. In the case that the allowance for travel and subsistence expenses is exceeded, NEAQA will cover any additional costs after the completion of the review. However, the ENQA Secretariat will endeavour to keep the travel and subsistence expenses in the limits of the planned budget, and will refund the difference to NEAQA if the travel and subsistence expenses go under budget.

It is understood that the fee of the progress visit is included in the overall cost of the review and will not be reimbursed in case the agency does not wish to benefit from it.

In the event of a second site visit required by the Board and aiming at completing the assessment of compliance, and should the agency accept a second visit, an additional fee of 500 EUR per expert, as well as travel and subsistence costs are recoverable from the agency.

7. Indicative schedule of the review

Agreement on terms of reference	March 2019
Appointment of review panel members	Late March/beginning of April 2019
Self-assessment completed	31 May 2019
Pre-screening of SAR by ENQA coordinator	June 2019
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	July 2019
Briefing of review panel members	August 2019

Review panel site visit	Late September/ beginning of October 2019
Draft of evaluation report and submitting it to ENQA coordinator for pre-screening	Mid-November 2019
Draft of evaluation report to NEAQA	End-November 2019
Statement of NEAQA to review panel (if necessary)	December 2019
Submission of final report to ENQA	Early-January 2020
Consideration of the report by ENQA Board	February 2020
Publication of the report	March 2020