

External review of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

## **Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE**

March 2017

### **1. Background and Context**

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) was established in 1997. It is an independent body, a registered charity and is a company limited by guarantee. It is governed by its Board.

QAA is a UK-wide agency covering England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, within a higher education system that is devolved, i.e. higher education policy is determined by each nation. QAA itself operates as a single entity across the whole of the UK with offices in Gloucester (head office), Cardiff, Glasgow and London.

QAA works with a diverse range of higher education providers (HEPs), both public and private. All HEPs in the UK are autonomous and independent; they are not owned by the state. There are around 600 higher education providers, of which 164 are degree awarding bodies in the UK (excluding those further education colleges that offer HE) and c. 3 million HE students. QAA assures and enhances quality through a number of review methods and is also responsible for the stewardship of the Quality Code, which sets out the expectations for all UK HE.

Since its last review, the landscape for quality assurance in HE in the UK has undergone several reviews and has changed significantly. This has impacted on how QAA works with the devolved nations and on the activities that it undertakes.

A Quality Assessment Review, conducted by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), in partnership with the Higher Education Funding Council, Wales (HEFCW), and the Department for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland (DELNI) led to a re-conceptualisation of QA in HE in England and Northern Ireland. QAA now operates parts of the system for QA in those two nations. A similar evaluation took place in Scotland. QAA has a UK remit for international work, including review of transnational education and for enhancement, in particular through its stewardship of the Quality Code and through ELIR, the enhancement-led institutional review method applied in Scotland. It continues with its work on Access to Higher Education and provides advice to government on Degree Awarding Powers.

In relation to the key recommendations in QAA's last ENQA review, which were related to the development of a risk-based approach to quality assurance, this matter is high on the agency's agenda at the moment, as the new regulatory framework for England and Northern Ireland seeks to develop that notion further and to successfully operationalise it, thus impacting on the current and future work of the agency.

A further change to QAA's portfolio of work is that it is working with HEFCE, which has been contracted by the government (Department of Education) to support the latter's work on the Teaching Excellence

Framework (TEF), particularly around the development and implementation of the assessment framework and process, and the development and training of TEF Officers and Assessors.

A bill reforming Higher Education and Research regulation in England passed through Parliament in 2017 and is expected to come into force in spring 2018, not long after the ENQA review panel visits QAA in February 2018. The Higher Education and Research Act 2017 creates a new Office for Students (OfS), responsible for maintaining a register of higher education providers in England. The OfS can designate an independent body to have responsibility for quality assessment as part of a co-regulatory system. QAA intends to become the designated quality body.

Due to the changes referred to above (which will be discussed in full in the self-assessment report for the review), QAA has needed to move to a different operating model that is appropriate for the new operating environment. The agency has adjusted its resourcing accordingly.

All the matters raised above will be considered in detail in the self-assessment report produced for the review.

QAA has been a member of ENQA since 2000 and is applying for renewal of membership.

QAA has been registered on EQAR since 2013 and is applying for renewal of registration.

## **2. Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation**

This review, will evaluate the way in which and to what extent QAA fulfils 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 QAA should be reconfirmed/granted and to EQAR to support QAA application to the register.

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

### **2.1 Activities of QAA within the scope of the ESG**

In order for QAA to apply for ENQA membership and for registration in EQAR, this review will analyse all activities of QAA 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.

QAA carries out a diverse portfolio of activities across the four devolved nations and across a diverse sector of higher education providers. Its activities may be described as falling into the following categories:

- Review activities (national and international)
- Enhancement and engagement activities
- Support for the government (advice on degree awarding powers and TEF as described above)
- Commercial activities.

The first two categories contain activities that fall within the scope of the ESG and are listed below. The third and fourth categories (government and commercial activities) do not. They will be discussed in the self-assessment report as part of the agency's portfolio of work as a whole.

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

- Higher education review (alternative providers) and its derivatives
- Enhancement-led Institutional review (Scotland)
- Higher education review (Wales)
- Degree-awarding powers (DAP)
- International quality review
- Quality review visit (Gateway)
- General Osteopathic Council review
- Unsatisfactory quality scheme/concerns
- Review of transnational education (TNE)

### **3. The Review Process**

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

The evaluation procedure consists of the following steps:

- Formulation of the Terms of Reference and protocol for the review;
- Nomination and appointment of the review panel;
- Self-assessment by QAA including the preparation of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit by the review panel to QAA;
- 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 follow-up visit.

#### **3.1 Nomination and appointment of the review team members**

The review panel consists of four members: one or two quality assurance experts, an academic employed by a higher education institution, 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.

The panel will be supported by the ENQA Secretariat review coordinator who will monitor the integrity of the process and ensure that ENQA expectations 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 QAA 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 the QAA review.

### **3.2 Self-assessment by QAA, including the preparation of a self-assessment report**

QAA 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 QAA 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 ENQA Guidelines for External Review of Quality Assurance Agencies, 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 4 weeks. In such cases, an additional fee of 1000 € 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**

QAA will draw up a draft proposal of the schedule for the site visit to be submitted to the review panel 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 2,5 days. The approved schedule shall be given to QAA at least one month before the site visit, in order to properly organise the requested interviews.

The review panel will be assisted by QAA in arriving in Gloucester, United Kingdom.

The site visit will close with an oral presentation and discussion of the major issues of the evaluation between the review panel and QAA.

### **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 QAA within 11 weeks of the site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If QAA 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 QAA, 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.

QAA is also requested to provide a letter addressed to the ENQA Board outlining its motivation applying for membership and the ways in which QAA expects to contribute to the work and objectives of ENQA during its membership. This letter will be discussed along with the final evaluation report.

### **4. Follow-up Process and Publication of the Report**

QAA 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. QAA 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. 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 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 by QAA. Its purpose is entirely developmental and has no impact on the judgement of membership and/or 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 QAA has met 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 so as 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 QAA and ENQA and until it is approved by the Board the report may not be used or relied upon by QAA, the panel and any third party and may not be disclosed without the prior written consent of ENQA. QAA 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

QAA 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 follow-up 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 follow-up 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, QAA 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 QAA if the travel and subsistence expenses go under budget.

The fee of the follow-up 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	By June 2017
Appointment of review panel members	November/December 2017
Self-assessment completed	Early December 2017
Pre-screening of SAR by ENQA coordinator	December 2017
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	January 2018
Briefing of review panel members	January 2018
Review panel site visit	Mid-February 2018

Draft of evaluation report and submitting it to ENQA coordinator for pre-screening	By April 2018
Draft of evaluation report to QAA	April 2018
Statement of QAA to review panel if necessary	Early May 2018
Submission of final report to ENQA	By Mid-May 2018
Consideration of the report by ENQA Board and response of QAA	June 2018
Publication of report	June/July 2018

