

External review of the Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education (A3ES) by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

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

March 2016

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

The “Agência de Avaliação e Acreditação do Ensino Superior” (Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education - A3ES) is a private law foundation established by Decree-Law no. 369/2007, of 5th November 2007, aiming at promoting and ensuring the quality of higher education.

The assessment and accreditation regime developed by the Agency is defined in Law no. 38/2007, of 16th August 2007.

The mission of A3ES is to contribute for the improvement of the quality of Portuguese higher education, through the assessment and accreditation of higher education institutions and their study cycles.

A3ES promotes the improvement of the performance of higher education institutions and their study cycles and guarantees the fulfilment of basic requirements for its official recognition. These general objectives are pursued through the assessment and accreditation activities carried out by the Agency, aiming at developing an internal quality assurance culture in every higher education institution.

Therefore, the objectives of A3ES are:

- To develop the quality assessment of the performance of higher education institutions and their study cycles;
- To substantiate the accreditation criteria, in order to translate them into qualitative appreciations, as well as to define the consequences of evaluation for the operation of study cycles and institutions;
- To promote the accreditation of study cycles and institutions, aiming at ensuring the fulfilment of the legal requirements for their recognition;
- To provide society with information on the quality of the performance of higher education institutions;
- To promote the internationalisation of the assessment process.

A3ES was evaluated by ENQA in 2014 according to the ESG and has been a full member of ENQA since June 2014, and is applying for ENQA renewal of membership.

A3ES has been registered on EQAR since November 2014. This review will also be used for applying for EQAR renewal of registration.

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

This review will evaluate the way in which and to what extent A3ES fulfils the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*. Consequently, the

review will also provide information to the ENQA Board to aid its consideration of whether membership of A3ES should be reconfirmed.

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

## **2.1 Activities of A3ES within the scope of the ESG**

In order for A3ES to apply for renewal of ENQA membership and for renewal of registration in EQAR, this review will analyse all activities of A3ES 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 A3ES have to be addressed in the external review:

- Prior accreditation of new study programmes in Portugal;
- Assessment/accreditation of study programmes in operation;
- Institutional Assessment;
- Audit/certification of internal quality assurance systems.

## **3. The Review Process**

The process is designed in the light of the *Guidelines for external reviews of quality assurance agencies in the European Higher Education Area*.

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 A3ES including the preparation of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit by the review panel to A3ES;
- 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 to 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, 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.

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 A3ES 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 A3ES review.

### **3.2 Self-assessment by A3ES, including the preparation of a self-assessment report**

A3ES 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 A3ES 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**

A3ES 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 A3ES at least one month before the site visit, in order to properly organise the requested interviews.

The review panel will be assisted by A3ES in arriving in Lisbon, Portugal.

The site visit will close with a final de-briefing meeting outlining the panel's overall impressions but not its judgement on the 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 A3ES within 11 weeks of the site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If A3ES 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 A3ES, finalise the document and submit it to ENQA.

The report is to be finalised within three months of the site visit and should be around 40 pages in length (excluding essential annexes).

A3ES is also requested to provide a letter addressed to the ENQA Board outlining its motivation in applying for membership and the ways in which A3ES 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**

A3ES 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. A3ES 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 A3ES. 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.

### **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 A3ES has met the ESG and can thus be reconfirmed as a member of ENQA. The report may also be used for other purposes, such as registration in 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 A3ES and ENQA and until the decision by the Board is made, the report may not be used or relied upon by A3ES, the panel and any third party and may not be disclosed without the

prior written consent of ENQA. A3ES may use the report at its discretion only after the Board has approved the report. The approval of the report is independent of the decision on membership.

Should the review report be used for applying to the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), 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

A3ES 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 excluded for a review team of 4 members. In the case that the allowance for travel and subsistence expenses is exceeded, A3ES 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 A3ES if the travel and subsistence expenses are 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	March 2018
Appointment of review panel members	June 2018
Self-assessment completed	October 2018
Pre-screening of SAR by ENQA coordinator	November 2018
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	December 2018
Briefing of review panel members	January 2019
Review panel site visit	February 2019
Draft of evaluation report and submission to ENQA coordinator for pre-screening	March 2019
Draft of evaluation report to A3ES	April 2019
Statement of A3ES to review panel if necessary	May 2019
Submission of final report to ENQA	May 2019
Consideration of the report by ENQA Board and response of A3ES	June 2019
Publication of report	July 2019