

External review of the Polish Accreditation Committee (PKA) by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE

January 2018

1. Background and Context

PKA was established as the State Accreditation Committee on 1 January 2002 on the basis of the amended Higher Education Act of 1990 and currently operates on the basis of the 2005 Law on Higher Education, amended in 2011, and resulting Regulations of the Minister of Science and Higher Education. It is the only statutory body responsible for external quality assurance in all Polish HEIs which operate on the basis of Law on Higher Education. PKA is a quality assurance agency conducting systematic activities in order to enhance the quality of education. Evaluations conducted by PKA are obligatory and negative assessment of the Committee may cause suspension or withdrawal of authorisation to provide degree programme in a given field of study and at a given level of study on the basis of a decision of Minister responsible for higher education.

PKA's main functions include:

- conducting programme evaluations;
- giving opinions to the Minister of Science and Higher Education on (applications for):
 - the establishment of HEIs, including HEIs or branch campuses to be established by foreign HEIs;
 - the granting of authorisations to HEIs' units to provide first-, second- or long-cycle programmes with specific fields of study and profiles (in cases where a given unit is not authorised to award postdoctoral degrees or the field of study concerned covers an academic area and domains of science / fine arts which do not correspond to those where the unit is authorised to award postdoctoral degrees; for the extent of HEIs' curricular autonomy).

In other words, PKA conducts mandatory ex-post programme evaluations and gives opinions or acts in an advisory capacity to the Minister of Science and Higher Education as part of what may be called ex-ante programme evaluation / accreditation (though the term 'evaluation' or 'accreditation' is not used in law to refer to this process). Additionally, it gives opinions to the Minister on matters related to: the re-granting to HEIs' units of suspended authorisations to provide first-, second- or long-cycle programmes; the compliance of first, second- and long-cycle programmes with the conditions for the provision of programmes laid down in national legislation; and the quality of education at HEIs' units applying for an authorisation to award doctoral and postdoctoral degrees.

National legislation sets a general framework for PKA's activities, including ex-post evaluations and the assessment of applications concerning the establishment of HEIs and programmes as part of ex-ante evaluation. However, pursuant to Law on Higher Education, PKA is free to determine detailed criteria and procedures for evaluation / assessment and to appoint experts or reviewers.

PKA's term of office is four years. The Agency may include 80 to 90 members who may be only academic staff holding at least a doctoral degree and employed at an HEI as the place of primary employment, except that the President of the Students' Parliament of the Republic of Poland (SPRP, a national student organisation) is a PKA member by virtue of law. Besides, under the law the representatives of employers' organizations are also appointed to the PKA bodies and sections.

PKA has been a full member of ENQA and has been registered in EQAR since 2009, a member of several multilateral networks, including CEENQA since 2002, of ECA and INQA/AHE since 2005. It has also signed bilateral cooperation agreements with a number of accreditation agencies across Europe.

PKA has been a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) since 2009 and is applying for renewal of membership.

PKA has been registered on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) since 2009 and is applying for renewal of EQAR registration.

2. Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

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

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

2.1 Activities of PKA within the scope of the ESG

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

- programme evaluations; (ex-post)
- opinions to the Minister of Science and Higher Education on (applications for): the establishment of HEIs, including HEIs or branch campuses to be established by foreign HEIs or/and the granting /re-granting of authorisations to HEIs' units to provide first-, second- or long-cycle programmes (ex-ante)

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

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

PKA 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 PKA 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

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

The review panel will be assisted by PKA in arriving in Warsaw, Poland

The site visit will close with a final de-briefing meeting outlining the panel's overall impressions but not its judgement on 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 PKA within 11 weeks of the site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If PKA 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 PKA, 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.

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

PKA 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. PKA 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 PKA. 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 PKA 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 PKA and ENQA and until it is approved by the Board the report may not be used or relied upon by PKA, the panel and any third party and may not be disclosed without the prior written consent of ENQA. PKA 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

PKA shall pay the review related fees as specified in the agreement between the external review coordinator and the PKA.

It is understood, that 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 ENQA Board and aiming at completing the assessment of compliance, and should the agency accept a second visit, additional fees will be charged.

7. Indicative Schedule of the Review

Agreement on terms of reference	January 2018
Appointment of review panel members	January/February 2018
Self-assessment completed	By the end of February 2018
Pre-screening of SAR by ENQA coordinator	March 2018
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	April 2018

Briefing of review panel members	May 2018
Review panel site visit	Late May/Early June 2018
Draft of evaluation report and submitting it to ENQA coordinator for pre-screening	July 2018
Draft of evaluation report to PKA	August 2018
Statement of PKA to review panel if necessary	August 2018
Submission of final report to ENQA	By Mid-September 2018
Consideration of the report by ENQA Board and response of PKA	October 2018
Publication of report	October/November 2018