

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

Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE

November 2015

1. Background and Context

AEQES is an independent public sector agency, practising formative evaluation based on a dialogue between all stakeholders within the French Community. Fully embedded in the European context, the Agency is responsible for assessing the quality of higher education and working for its continuous improvement.

The Agency autonomously develops its procedures used for assessing the quality of teaching in bachelor and masters programmes in the institutions authorised by the French Community. It establishes an evaluation-plan on a 10-year basis, monitoring an appropriate group of programmes with the aim of fostering the alignment of programme profiles and objectives with the missions of the institutions involved, disseminating good practice and promoting synergies.

The Agency organises evaluation and follow-up procedures in line with its code of ethics. It selects its experts, informs them of their mission and its context and ensures that they can carry out their work in complete independence.

The Agency provides information on the quality of higher education by publishing on its website the review reports, the system-wide analyses and the follow-up action plans, and highlighting best practice. It provides the heads of the institutions reviewed and the Government with proposals on ways of enhancing quality.

The Agency, through its broad-based participative structure, remains in permanent dialogue with stakeholders. It takes any initiative deemed fit for accomplishing its duties, updating its procedures on the basis of experience gained.

Its participation in international bodies and events for quality assurance in higher education are also to be seen in the context of the Agency as a learning organisation.

By basing all its working procedures on the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), by working together with other agencies or bodies in other countries, and by disseminating information on European developments in higher education, the Agency can be seen as being a part of an overall European process.

AEQES has been a full member of ENQA since 2011 and is applying for renewal of ENQA membership.

AEQES has been registered on EQAR since 2012 and is applying for renewal.

2. Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

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

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

2.1 Activities of AEQES within the scope of the ESG

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

- External evaluations of programmes (including follow-up evaluations)

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 AEQES including the preparation of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit by the review panel to AEQES;
- 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. Two of the reviewers are nominated by the ENQA Board on the basis of proposals submitted to ENQA by the member national agencies. The third external reviewer is drawn from a nomination provided by the European University Association (EUA) or the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE). The nomination of the student member comes from the European Students' Union (ESU).

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 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 AEQES 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 AEQES review.

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

AEQES 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 AEQES 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

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

The review panel will be assisted by AEQES in arriving in Brussels, Belgium.

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

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 AEQES within 11 weeks of the site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If AEQES 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 AEQES, finalise the document and submit it to AEQES and 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.

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

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

AEQES 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 (including follow-up visit)	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, AEQES 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 AEQES 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	November 2015
Appointment of review panel members	December 2015
Self-assessment completed	April 2016
Pre-screening of SER by ENQA coordinator	May 2016
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	June 2016
Briefing of review panel members	July 2016
Review panel site visit	September 2016
Draft of evaluation report and submitting it to ENQA coordinator for pre-screening	November 2016
Draft of evaluation report to AEQES	December 2016
Statement of AEQES to review panel if necessary	December 2016
Submission of final report to ENQA	January 2017

Consideration of the report by ENQA Board and response of AEQES	February 2017
Publication of report	March 2017