

External review of the Agency For Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria)
by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE

January 2018

1. Background and Context

The Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria) was founded in 2011 as part of the restructuring of the external quality assurance system in Austria. As an essential component of the restructuring three former quality assurance organisations were merged and transformed into AQ Austria as a new sector-spanning and independent agency.

According to its legal mandate, AQ Austria is responsible for all post-secondary higher education institutions in Austria (public universities, universities of applied sciences, private universities (with the exception of university colleges of teacher education, the Institute of Science and Technology Austria (IST Austria) and the universities for philosophy and theology).

The agency's remit comprises a large array of legally regulated functions in the field of external quality assurance, which encompasses the accreditation of higher education institutions and their programmes (private universities and universities of applied sciences), audits of the internal quality management systems (public universities and universities of applied sciences), consultancy and thematic analysis. Since 2014, the agency is also responsible for the notification of foreign study programmes offered in Austria.

In addition to its legal functions within Austria AQ Austria is also active abroad. It is recognized by the German Accreditation Council for conducting accreditation procedures in Germany, and also by the Kazakh ministry for conducting accreditation procedures in Kazakhstan. AQ Austria also collaborates with universities in other EHEA countries by way of offering programme accreditation and consultancy services.

The Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria is incorporated under public law. Its bodies, their powers and composition are legally determined.

The Board of AQ Austria is the central independent decision-making body of the agency. This committee of experts is in particular responsible for all decisions regarding accreditation and certification, procedural guidelines and standards, supervision responsibilities vis-à-vis accredited educational institutions in Austria. Because of the various types of quality assurance processes, the Board possesses regulatory as well as non-regulatory competencies. The Board is made up of fourteen members, of that eight are academics (at least half of them must be foreign members), two are students (of the two one from abroad) and four members come from the professional practical field.

In addition to the Board, two bodies serve the main purpose of involving stakeholders, namely the General Meeting comprising 23 representatives of stakeholder organisations and the Governing Committee comprising 5 members from among the general Meeting.

The secretariat comprises 30 staff, and the annual budget is approx. 2.8 Million EURO.

AQ Austria has been an ENQA member since 2012 and is applying for renewal of its membership.

AQ Austria has been registered on EQAR since 2014 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 AQ Austria 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 AQ Austria should be reconfirmed and to EQAR to support AQ Austria application to the register.

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

2.1 Activities of AQ Austria within the scope of the ESG

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

- Quality Audits of internal quality management systems at Austrian public universities and at universities of applied sciences (compulsory) and in EHEA countries.
- Institutional and programme accreditation at Austrian private universities and universities of applied sciences (compulsory)
- Notification of foreign study programmes offered in Austria (compulsory)
- Voluntary accreditation of continuing education study programmes at Austrian higher education institutions
- System accreditation and programme accreditation in Germany (compulsory)
- International programme accreditation (voluntary); (AQ Austria does not conduct quality assurance procedures outside the EHEA).
- Institutional accreditation in Switzerland
- Voluntary Evaluation of programmes at HEIs (in Austria and abroad)

Furthermore, the self-assessment report and external review report should also address the agency's recognition procedure of external QA activities of other agencies and how AQ Austria will ensure that the decisions taken on the basis of reviews carried out by other agencies are in line with the ESG, especially in case the agency is not registered on EQAR.

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 AQ Austria including the preparation of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit by the review panel to AQ Austria;
- 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 and student member. 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.

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 AQ Austria 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 AQ Austria review.

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

AQ Austria 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 AQ Austria 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 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

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

The review panel will be assisted by AQ Austria in arriving in Vienna, Austria.

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

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

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

AQ Austria 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, AQ Austria 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 AQ Austria 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/December 2017
Appointment of review panel members	September 2018
Self-assessment completed	By Mid-November 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 2018
Review panel site visit	February 2019
Draft of evaluation report and submitting it to ENQA coordinator for pre-screening	By April 2019
Draft of evaluation report to AQ Austria	April 2019
Statement of AQ Austria to review panel if necessary	Early May 2019
Submission of final report to ENQA	By mid-May 2019
Consideration of the report by ENQA Board and response of AQ Austria	June 2019
Publication of the report	June 2019