

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

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

April 2018

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

#### **1.1 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Cyprus**

Higher Education in Cyprus is offered by public and private universities as well as by public and private institutions at non university level.

The competent authority responsible for all HEIs is the Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC).

**1.1.1** Public universities are established by law and they are financed primarily by the government. The University of Cyprus and the Cyprus University of Technology are conventional universities which have as their main goal to promote education and research. The Open University of Cyprus is a distance learning university which aims to provide access to higher education to adult learners and to promote lifelong learning. Before the establishment of CYQAA, public universities were not externally evaluated and accredited by a national quality assurance body. Now, public Universities are obliged by law to submit their programs of study for external evaluation-accreditation by CYQAA.

**1.1.2** Private universities are autonomous to define their own goals and strategies. They have undergone external evaluation within the framework of the previous legislation, by the Evaluation Committee for Private Universities (ECPU) and they were provided with a licence to operate on the basis of a relevant decision by the Council of Ministers. They are established and financed by non-governmental institutions or founders. Private universities are obliged by law to submit their programs of study for external evaluation-accreditation by CYQAA.

**1.1.3** Public institutions of higher education are non-university institutions which provide, primarily, vocational education and training. Before the establishment of CYQAA, these institutions, were not externally evaluated and accredited by a national quality assurance body.

**1.1.4** Private Institutions of Tertiary Education are non-university institutions which offer a wide range of academic as well as vocational programs of study at the following levels:

- Certificate (One Year, 60 ECTS)
- Diploma (Two Years, 120 ECTS)
- Higher Diploma (Three Years, 180 ECTS)
- Bachelor Degree (Four Years, 240 ECTS)
- Master Degree (One to Two Years, 90 or 120 ECTS)
- PhD Degree (Three to Four Years)

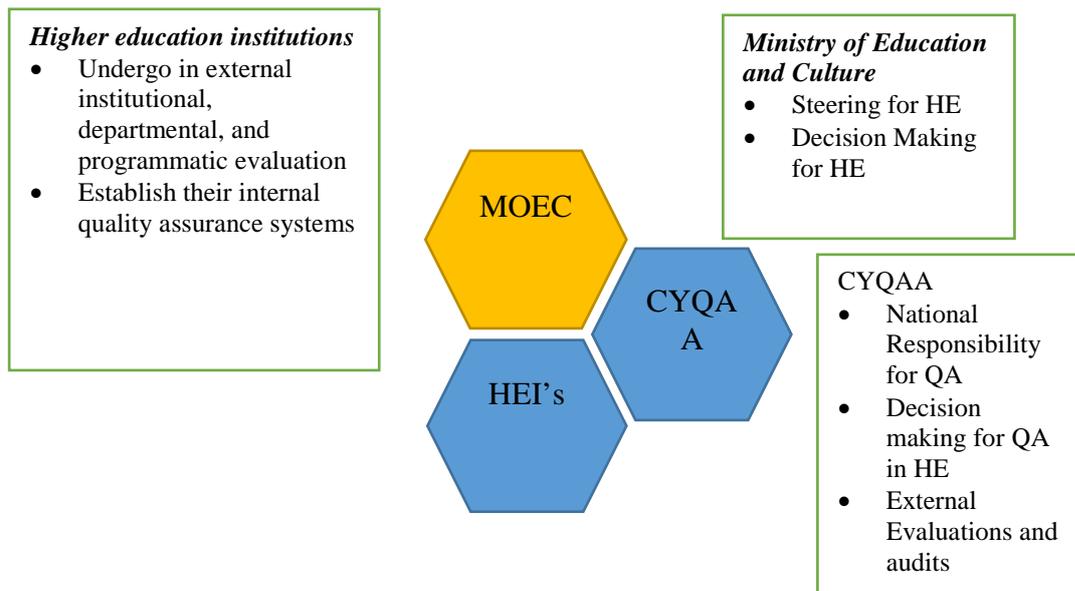
It should be noted, that up until the establishment of CYQAA, programmatic external evaluation by the relevant national quality assurance body was not obligatory.

## 1.2 Quality Assurance in Higher Education

CYQAA is responsible to ensure the quality of higher education in Cyprus, and to support through the procedures provided by the relevant legislation, for the continuous improvement and upgrading of higher education institutions and their programs of study. One of the primary aims of CYQAA is to provide those conditions necessary for the creation of a quality driven culture.

The main areas of CYQAA's responsibilities, according to the legislation, are presented in 2.1.

Figure 1: The national quality assurance system in Cyprus



Quality of higher education is an inseparable component of government policy to further develop higher education and establish Cyprus as an international and regional education centre. A pivotal moment for the accomplishment of the strategic goals of the MOEC was the establishment of the "Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education" (CYQAA) in November of 2015 [Law 136(I)/2015].

CYQAA is steered by a Council of eleven members, including its President. The Council is appointed by the Council of Ministers for a five-year period on the basis of recommendations from the Minister of Education and Culture. According to the legislation, eight council members are academics, at the rank of Professor or Professor Emeritus, who have experience in university administration matters and on issues of quality assurance in higher education. Two members of the Council come from professional organizations and one member is an undergraduate student representative. It is noted that the student representative's term of office has a duration of two years.

The Agency assumed the responsibilities of quality assurance bodies which were previously operating in Cyprus: The Council of Educational Evaluation-Accreditation, the Advisory Committee on Higher Education, and the Evaluation Committee for Private Universities.

- The Council of Educational Evaluation-Accreditation (*SEKAP*), was the competent authority responsible for the external evaluation and accreditation of programs of study offered by private, non-university HEI's. It has to be noted that external evaluation and accreditation of programs of study was not compulsory and was sought for by HEIs on a voluntary basis. It should also be highlighted that according to the previous legislative framework the

accreditation of programs of study had to be ratified by the Minister of Education and Culture.

- The Advisory Committee on Higher Education (*SETE*) was responsible for the establishment of non-university public and private HEIs, as well for the examination of new programs of study offered by private non-university HEI's. SETE acted as an advisory body to the Minister of Education and Culture. Its competency was limited to advising the Minister with regards to the registration of programs of study as well as the establishment of HEIs at non-university level and by no means this constituted the accreditation of the said programs and institutions.
- The Evaluation Committee for Private Universities (ECPU), was the competent authority responsible for the external evaluation of private universities and their programs of study. ECPU's decisions had to be ratified by the Minister of Education and Culture.

With the enactment of the new legislation and the establishment of CYQAA, prevailing approaches to quality assurance radically changed with the implementation of transparent procedures for external evaluation and accreditation equal for all. The most significant improvements provided for by the new legislative framework are:

- The legal obligation for HEIs (public and private at university and non-university level), for external evaluation, both programmatic and institutional.
- The compliance of the external evaluation standards and indicators with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).
- The compulsory evaluation and accreditation of cross-border education, offered by local institutions in member states or third-party countries
- Scrutiny of the preconditions for the provision, by foreign institutions, of cross-border education in Cyprus.
- Examination of inter-institutional collaborations which lead to the award of joint degrees

Most importantly, CYQAA acts as a catalyst for the creation of a quality driven culture, through which HEIs are enabled to enhance their quality assurance procedures and mechanisms.

CYQAA has been an ENQA affiliate since April 2016 and is applying for ENQA membership.

CYQAA is applying for registration on EQAR.

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

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

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

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

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

- Institutional evaluation – accreditation;
- Departmental evaluation-Accreditation;
- Programme evaluation – accreditation;
- Joint programme evaluation – accreditation;
- Evaluation and accreditation of cross-border education, offered by local institutions in member states or third party countries;
- Assessment of the conditions for the provision of cross-border education from foreign institutions in Cyprus;
- Audit.

Furthermore, the self-assessment report (and external review report) should also address CYQAA processes for the recognition of the accreditation activity of other quality assurance agencies and in particular how CYQAA ensures ESG compliance in cases where the agencies are not registered in 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 CYQAA including the preparation of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit by the review panel to CYQAA;
- 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.

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 CYQAA 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 CYQAA review.

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

CYQAA 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 CYQAA 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**

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

The review panel will be assisted by CYQAA in arriving in Nicosia, Cyprus.

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 CYQAA within 11 weeks of the site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If CYQAA 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 CYQAA, 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.

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

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

CYQAA 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) |

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|---|--------------------------|
| 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, CYQAA 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 CYQAA 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

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|--|---|
| Agreement on terms of reference  | February 2018   |
| Appointment of review panel members  | April 2018  |
| Self-assessment completed  | May 2018  |
| Pre-screening of SAR by ENQA coordinator   | May 2018  |
| Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable                        | June/July 2018  |
| Briefing of review panel members   | August 2018   |
| Review panel site visit  | Late September/Early October 2018                               |
| Draft of evaluation report and submitting it to ENQA coordinator for pre-screening | November 2018   |
| Draft of evaluation report to CYQAA  | December 2018   |
| Statement of CYQAA to review panel if necessary                                    | December 2018   |
| Submission of final report to ENQA   | January 2019  |
| Consideration of the report by ENQA Board and response of CYQAA                    | February 2019 (depending on the date of the ENQA Board meeting) |
| Publication of the report  | February/March 2019   |