

External review of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA)  
by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

**Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE**

January 2017

**1. Background and Context**

EKKA was established under the Universities Act in 2009 on the basis of the Estonian Higher Education Accreditation Centre (EKAK, established in 1997). From 2009 until 2015, EKKA was called “Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency”. Starting from 1 February 2015, the name was changed to “Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education”. EKKA is an independent structural unit of Archimedes Foundation. The Foundation is an independent legal body established 1997 by the Estonian government with the objective to coordinate and implement different international and national programmes and projects in the field of training, education and research. EKKA is independent in developing its principles and procedures for quality assessment and in adopting assessment decisions.

EKKA is comprised of the Bureau, which administers and organises EKKA's work, and two councils: Higher Education Quality Assessment Council and Quality Assessment Council for Vocational Education and Training (VET).

EKKA:

- provides institutional accreditation of higher education institutions;
- provides quality assessment of study programme groups in higher education;
- provides accreditation of study programme groups in vocational education and training;
- conducts expert analyses in order to grant educational institutions the right to conduct studies;
- analyses evaluation results and makes recommendations for improvement to educational institutions;
- informs the general public of the outcomes of evaluations;
- offers training for higher education institutions, VET institutions and evaluation experts;
- participates in international networks and cooperation projects.

EKKA is a full member of International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA) and participates in the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) network. In 2014, EKKA organised the INQAAHE biannual Forum in Tallinn. In 2015, EKKA's Director for Development and International Cooperation was elected to the Board of Directors of INQAAHE. EKKA staff members are elected to the boards of quality assurance agencies in Russia and Kazakhstan.

EKKA has been a full member of ENQA since April 2013 and is applying for renewal of ENQA membership.

EKKA has been registered on EQAR since October 2013 and is applying for renewal.

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

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

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

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

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

- Institutional accreditation of higher education institutions;
- Quality assessment of study programme groups in the first and second cycles of higher education;
- Quality assessment of study programme groups in the third cycle of higher education;
- Initial assessment of study programme groups;
- Transitional evaluation and re-evaluation of study programme groups;
- Accreditation of Master's study programmes in law in Moldova.

Furthermore, the self-assessment report and external review report should also address the recognition of the external quality assurance activities carried out by other quality assurance agencies.

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

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

EKKA 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 EKKA 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**

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

The review panel will be assisted by EKKA in arriving in Tallinn, Estonia.

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

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

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

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

EKKA 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, EKKA 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 EKKA 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 2016
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Appointment of review panel members	May 2017
Self-assessment completed	By 15 <sup>th</sup> of June 2017
Pre-screening of SER by ENQA coordinator	July 2017
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	August 2017
Briefing of review panel members	August/early September 2017
Review panel site visit	Early October 2017
Draft of evaluation report and submitting it to ENQA coordinator for pre-screening	November 2017
Draft of evaluation report to EKKA	December 2017
Statement of EKKA to review panel if necessary	December 2017
Submission of final report to ENQA	January 2018
Consideration of the report by ENQA Board and response of EKKA	February 2018
Publication of the report	February/March 2018