

External review of the Flemish Higher Education Council - Quality Assurance (VLUHR QA) by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE

August 2018

1. Background and Context

VLUHR QA is an independent non-profit agency for external quality assurance that contributes to the safeguarding and improvement of the quality in higher education. VLUHR QA is a partner in stimulating, developing and implementing a quality culture in higher education. As a centre of expertise, it aims to offer and share its knowledge with stakeholders and interesting parties. VLUHR QA stands for commitment, expertise, independency, equity, transparency and improvement-oriented approach.

Over the past years, VLUHR QA has built up an extensive expertise in assessing the professional and academic study programmes in Flanders. In 2015 a new decree regarding quality assurance in HE was approved. This decree stipulates that each HE institution must undergo an institutional review (coordinated by the NVAO). Furthermore the HE institutions must install a quality assurance system to safeguard the quality of their study programmes. Each HE institution has developed its own QA system. As a consequence the existing study programmes do no longer need to be assessed by VLUHR QA.

Since 2015 VLUHR QA coordinates the assessments of new study programmes, joint programmes and programmes in an improvement process of universities and university colleges. VLUHR QA also coordinates the programme assessments of registered institutions.

VLUHR QA has been an ENQA member since 2013 and is applying for renewal of its membership.

VLUHR QA has been registered on EQAR since 2013 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 VLUHR QA 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 VLUHR QA should be reconfirmed and to EQAR to support VLUHR QA application to the register.

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

2.1 Activities of VLUHR QA within the scope of the ESG

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

Since 2015 VLUHR QA coordinates the 1) **assessments of new study programmes**, 2) **joint programmes** and 3) **programmes in an improvement process of universities and university colleges**. VLUHR QA also coordinates 4) **the programme assessments of registered institutions**. The assessment comprises a self-assessment report, a site visit, an evaluation by an independent panel of experts using a set of predefined standards and the publication of the panel's findings. The programmes use the assessment report to apply for accreditation with the accreditation organisation NVAO.

The following activities of VLUHR QA are not included in the external review:

As a consequence of the decree of 2015, VLUHR QA can share its expertise with HE institutions and supports the institutions in quality assurance activities that are not in the scope of the VLUHR QA assessment activities. The support that VLUHR QA provides is demand-driven and is different from one institution to another. These activities do not refer to the typical terminology as evaluation, assessment, review or audit. Current supporting activities are e.g. the selection and training of experts and acting as an external secretary.

Furthermore, VLUHR QA shares its expertise with organizations other than universities and university colleges, such as NVAO, VVS, MUSIQUE, ENQA, FPS Health. Current supporting activities are e.g. the establishment of assessment frameworks, carrying out a SWOT analysis and acting as an external secretary. These activities are also demand-driven and do not fall within the scope of the ESG.

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

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

VLUHR QA 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 VLUHR QA 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

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

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

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

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

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

VLUHR QA 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, VLUHR QA 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 VLUHR QA 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	July/August 2018
Appointment of review panel members	February 2019
Self-assessment completed	By 1 st of March 2019
Pre-screening of SAR by ENQA coordinator	March 2019
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	April 2019
Briefing of review panel members	May 2019
Review panel site visit	Early June 2019
Draft of evaluation report and submitting it to ENQA coordinator for pre-screening	By the end of July 2019
Draft of evaluation report to VLUHR QA	August 2019
Statement of VLUHR QA to review panel if necessary	August/Early September 2019
Submission of final report to ENQA	By Mid-September 2019
Consideration of the report by ENQA Board and response of VLUHR QA	October 2019
Publication of the report	October 2019