

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

Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE

September 2013

1. Background and Context

The Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria) was established as part of a fundamental reorganisation of the system of external quality assurance in Austria. The legal basis for establishing AQ Austria is the Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (Hochschul-Qualitätssicherungsgesetz) which entered into force on 1 March 2012.

According to AQ Austria's legal remit, AQ Austria is responsible for the entire higher education sector in Austria (except university colleges of teacher education).

In carrying out its responsibilities, AQ Austria follows these three basic principles:

- The higher education institutions bear the main responsibility for the quality of studies and for quality assurance.
- AQ Austria is an independent institution, with regard both to the Federal Ministry of Science and Research as well as to the higher education institutions.
- AQ Austria applies international standards of quality assurance within the Austrian higher education system.

AQ Austria includes the competences and activities of the three existing organisations, namely the Österreichischer Akkreditierungsrat (Austrian Accreditation Council – ÖAR) the Fachhochschulrat (FH Council - FHR) and the Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance (AQA). According to the law, AQ Austria is the legal successor of ÖAR and FHR. The Full membership of ÖAR and FHR was transferred to AQ Austria on 12 April 2012.

The ENQA policy on amalgamation of agencies requires that the newly established agency undergoes an external ENQA coordinated review within two years of the amalgamation being completed, i.e. within April 2014.

2. Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

This is a type A review, as defined in the *Guidelines for external reviews of quality assurance agencies in the European Higher Education Area*. It will evaluate the way in which and to what extent AQ Austria fulfils the criteria for the ENQA membership and thus the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*. Consequently, the review will also provide information to the ENQA Board to aid its consideration of whether AQ Austria should be reconfirmed Full Membership of ENQA. The review panel is not expected, however, to make any judgements as regards the reconfirmation of Full Membership.

3. The Review Process

The process is designed in the light of the *Guidelines for external reviews of quality assurance agencies in the European Higher Education Area*.

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-evaluation by AQ Austria including the preparation of a self-evaluation 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 Review Committee of the ENQA Board;
- 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.

3.1 Nomination and appointment of the review team members

The review panel consists of five members: four external reviewers (one or two quality assurance experts, representative(s) of higher education institutions, student member) and a review secretary. Three of the reviewers (including the review secretary) are nominated by the ENQA Board on the basis of proposals submitted to ENQA by the national agencies, and are drawn from senior serving members of Board/Council or staff of ENQA member agencies. The fourth external reviewer is drawn from a nomination provided by the European University Association (EUA). The nomination of the student member is asked from the European Students' Union (ESU). One of the panel members serves as the chair of the review.

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 is no known conflict of interest. The experts will have to sign a non-conflict of interest statement as regards the AQ Austria review.

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

AQ Austria is responsible for the execution and organisation of its own self-evaluation process and shall take into account the following guidance:

- Self-evaluation is organised as a project with a clearly defined schedule and includes all relevant internal and external stakeholders;
- The self-evaluation report is broken down by the topics of the evaluation: background description of the current situation of the Agency; analysis and appraisal of the current situation; proposals for improvement and measures already planned; a summary of perceived strengths and weaknesses (SWOT analysis);
- 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 criteria for the ENQA membership and thus the ESG. The report is submitted to the review panel a minimum of eight 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 days. The approved schedule shall be given to AQ Austria at least one month before the dates of the 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 an oral presentation and discussion of the major issues of the evaluation between the review panel and AQ Austria.

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 article 2. It will also provide a clear rationale for its findings with regards to each ENQA membership criteria. A draft will be submitted for comment to AQ Austria within two months 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 AQ Austria and ENQA.

The report is to be finalised within three months of the site visit and will not exceed 40 pages in length.

4. Follow-up Process and Publication of the Report

AQ Austria will consider the expert panel's report and inform ENQA of its plans to implement any recommendations contained in the report. The review report will be published on the AQ Austria website. The report will also be published on the ENQA website, regardless of the review outcome and decision by the Board.

5. Budget

AQ Austria shall pay the following review related fees:

Fee of the Chair	4,750 EUR
Fee of the Secretary	4,750 EUR
Fee of the 3 other panel members	8,250 EUR (2,750 EUR each)
Administrative overhead for ENQA Secretariat	5,000 EUR
Experts Training fund	1,250 EUR
Travel and subsistence expenses (approximate)	6,000 EUR

This gives a total indicative cost of 30,000 EUR for a review team of 5 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.

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.

6. 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 to be used by the Board of ENQA for the purpose of reaching a conclusion on whether AQ Austria has or has not met the membership criteria/ESG.

The working paper authored by the Panel is to be considered as a report owned by ENQA only after being approved by the ENQA Board.

Once submitted to AQ Austria and ENQA and until the decision by the Board is made, the working paper 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 decision has been made.

AQ Austria shall be aware that, should an application to the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) be submitted, the Chair of the panel might be approached by the Register Committee for any request for clarification. The Chair of the panel may give a response but he/she is requested to copy the Director of ENQA on all correspondence.

7. Indicative Schedule of the Review

The duration of the evaluation is scheduled to take about 9 months, from October 2013 to June 2014:

Agreement on terms of reference and protocol for review	October 2013
Appointment of review panel members	Oct-Nov 2013
Self-evaluation completed	December 2013
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	December 2013
Briefing of review panel members	January 2014
Review panel site visit	February 2014
Draft of evaluation report to AQ Austria	April 2014
Statement of AQ Austria to review panel if necessary	April 2014
Submission of final report to ENQA	May 2014
Consideration of the report by ENQA and response of AQ Austria	June 2014
Publication of report	June 2014