

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

**Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE**

July 2012

**1. Background and Context**

The Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency (EKKA) promotes the quality of higher education and vocational education and training (VET) in Estonia, values the best quality assurance practices and disseminates them. Upon making assessment decisions, EKKA is independent and sovereign.

EKKA continues the work of the Estonian Higher Education Accreditation Centre and the Estonian Higher Education Quality Assessment Council that operated from 1997 to 2008. EKKA was established on January 1, 2009.

Two councils - The Higher Education Quality Assessment Council and VET Quality Assessment Council - currently operate as parts of EKKA.

EKKA:

- offers consultations on quality assurance in higher education and VET as well as training for higher education institutions, VET institutions and evaluation experts
- conducts institutional accreditation of higher education institutions in Estonia and quality assessment of study programme groups
- conducts expert analyses in order to grant the higher education institutions the right to conduct studies
- conduct expert analyses of study programmes that are not yet registered in Estonia
- conducts accreditation of study programme groups of VET institutions
- analyses the evaluation process and makes information about the outcomes of assessment of higher education and VET institutions publicly available
- participates in international higher education and VET quality assurance networks, such as ENQA, INQAAHE, CEEN, EQAVET, and others

EKKA had been Full member of ENQA since 2002 and was re-designated as Candidate member of ENQA on 19 September 2010.

**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 EKKA 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 EKKA should be reconfirmed Full Member of ENQA. The review panel is not expected, however, to make any judgements as regards granting EKKA Full Membership in ENQA.

### **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 EKKA including the preparation of a self-evaluation 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 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 EKKA with the list of suggested experts with their respective curricula 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 the EKKA review.

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

EKKA 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;
- 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 criteria for the ENQA membership and thus the ESG. The report is submitted to the review panel a minimum of four weeks prior to the site visit.

### **3.3 A Site Visit by the Review Panel**

EKKA will draw up a draft proposal of schedule of the site visit to be submitted to the review panel at least three 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 EKKA at least two months before the dates of the visit, in order to properly organise the requested interviews.

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

Where appropriate, 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 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 EKKA within two months 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.

## **4. Follow-up Process and Publication of the Report**

EKKA will consider the expert panel's report and inform ENQA of its plans to implement any recommendations contained in the report. Subsequent to the discussion of the evaluation results and any planned implementation measures with ENQA, the review report and the follow-up plans agreed upon will be published on the EKKA website.

## **5. Budget**

EKKA shall pay the following review related fees:

- Chair: 4,750 EUR
- Review secretary: 4,750 EUR
- Other panel members (2,750 EUR for each of the three panel members):  
8,250 EUR
- 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, 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.

## **6. Indicative Schedule of the Review**

The duration of the evaluation is scheduled to take about 15 months, from January 2012 to April 2013:

EKKA begins self-evaluation	January 2012
Agreement on terms of reference and protocol for review	July 2012
Appointment of review panel members	July 2012
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	September 2012
EKKA self-evaluation completed	October 2012
Briefing of review panel members	November 2012
Review panel site visit	December 2012
Draft of evaluation report to EKKA	February 2013
Statement of EKKA to review panel if necessary	end Feb./beg March 2013
Submission of final report to EKKA and ENQA	March 2013
Consideration of the report by ENQA and response of EKKA	March 2013
Publication of report and implementation plan	April 2013