

External review of the Swiss Center of Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education (OAQ) by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE

March 2011

1. Background and Context

The Swiss Center of Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education (OAQ) was founded in 2001 and entrusted with the task of ensuring and promoting the quality of teaching and research at Swiss universities.

The OAQ legal basis is Art. 7 of the *Swiss Law on Financial Aid to Universities and Cooperation in matters relating to Universities* of 8 October 1999 (UFG, SR 414.20) and Art. 7 of the *Intercantonal Convention on Coordinating University Policy* of 9 December 1999. The organisation and the responsibilities of the OAQ are outlined in Art. 18-23 of the *Cooperation Agreement between the Federal Government and University Cantons on matters relating to Universities* of 14 December 2000 (SR 414.205).

On behalf of the federal and cantonal authorities, and in accordance with best international practices, the OAQ carries out various quality assessments with autonomous responsibility for its operations.

These assessments include:

- Institutional Quality Audits, cyclical obligatory assessment of the internal quality assurance system at public HEI, linked to the recognition of the right to financial aid (carried out 2 cycles in 2003-4 and 2007-8);
- Accreditation (at institutional and programme level) in the frame of public and private university institutions, on a voluntary basis (since 2003);
- Accreditation of medical programmes (basic as well as postgraduate medical education), legally required by the Federal Office of Public Health (carried out 2 full cycles for the postgraduate medical education and ongoing first cycle on basic medical education);



- Accreditation (at institutional and programme level) in the frame of universities of applied sciences, where programme accreditation is legally required as linked to the right to deliver a degree (since 2008, subsequent to the OAQ recognition by the Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology);
- Accreditation in Germany (Systemakkreditierung and/or programme accreditation), in the frame of higher education institutions (since 2010, subsequent to the OAQ accreditation by the German Accreditation Council).

In order to fulfill the requirements of all these mandates the OAQ staff has developed since its foundation in quantity and quality. Staff units have more than doubled since 2002 and the staff is currently more operational, as the conceptual phase during the development of all main OAQ instruments was concentrated in the first years of operation.

Since this year the OAQ has opened its services towards foreign jurisdictions, more particularly Germany, appointing an independent Accreditation Board with full decision-making powers. This status as accrediting body is a major development for an agency that has mainly performed on federal mandates and therefore with limited decision-making prerogatives.

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

In addition to analysing OAQ compliance with the ENQA membership criteria, and thus with the ESG, the review aims to give background information on the context of OAQ's operation, role and tasks.



3. The Review Process

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

The evaluation procedure will consist 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 OAQ including the preparation of a self-evaluation report;
- A site visit by the review panel to OAQ;
- 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 will normally consist 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) will be nominated by the ENQA Board on the basis of proposals submitted to ENQA by the national agencies, and will normally be drawn from senior serving members of Board/Council or staff of ENQA member agencies. The fourth external reviewer will be drawn from a nomination provided either by the European University Association (EUA) or the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE). The nomination of the student member will be asked from the European Students' Union (ESU). One of the panel members will serve as the chair of the review.

Current members of the ENQA Board will not be eligible to serve as reviewers.

ENQA will provide to OAQ 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 OAQ review.



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

OAQ 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 OAQ fulfils its tasks of external quality assurance and meets the criteria for the ENQA membership and thus the ESG. The report will be submitted to the review panel a minimum of four weeks prior to the site visit.

3.3 A Site Visit by the Review Panel

The OAQ 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 will include an indicative timetable of the meetings and other exercises to be undertaken by the review panel during the site visit, the duration of which will normally be 2 days. The approved schedule shall be given to the OAQ 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 OAQ in arriving to Bern (Switzerland).

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 OAQ.

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 OAQ within two months of the site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If OAQ 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 OAQ, finalise the document and submit it to OAQ 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

OAQ 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 OAQ website.

5. Budget

5.1 OAQ shall pay the following review related fees:

- Chair: 5.000 EUR
- Review secretary: 5.000 EUR
- Other panel members (3): 3.000 EUR
- Administrative overhead for ENQA Secretariat: 5.000 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, OAQ 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 OAQ 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 12 months, from January 2011 to December 2011:

OAQ begins self-evaluation	January 2011
Appointment of review panel members by ENQA	January 2011
Agreement on terms of reference and protocol for review	February 2011
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	March 2011
OAQ self-evaluation completed	end of May 2011
Briefing of review panel members	June 2011
Review panel site visit	27-29 June 2011
Draft of evaluation report to OAQ	end of Aug 2011
Statement of OAQ to review panel if necessary	mid Sept 2011
Submission of final report to OAQ and ENQA	September 2011
Consideration of the report by ENQA and response of OAQ	November 2011
Publication of report and implementation plan	December 2011

