

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

Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE

December 2012

1. Background and Context

QAA was established in 1997 through the transfer of functions and staff from the former Higher Education Quality Council and the quality assessment divisions of the higher education funding councils for England and Wales.

The agency conducts reviews of institutions with regard to standards of awards and the quality of provision and publishes reports detailing the findings, highlighting good practice and containing recommendations to help improve quality.

To support standards and promote quality enhancement, QAA publishes a range of reference points and guidance - in particular the Quality Code, launched in December 2011 - that is routinely used by institutions in setting standards and designing a quality student experience. QAA carries out and publishes reviews against these standards, reporting on the performance of institutions.

In addition, QAA advises governments on applications for the grant of degree awarding powers and university title - undertaking reviews of applicants and making recommendations.

The agency informs others of, and contributes to, international development in the quality assurance of higher education. It also manages the recognition scheme related to the Access to Higher Education qualification.

QAA's aims for 2011-14 are to:

- meet students' needs and be valued by them
- safeguard standards in an increasingly diverse UK and international context
- drive improvements in UK higher education
- improve public understanding of higher education standards and quality.

The majority of staff is based in Gloucester, while a smaller team, devoted to quality assurance in Scotland, is based in Glasgow.

QAA has been Full member of ENQA since 2000. Full membership was confirmed following an external review on 19 November 2008.

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 QAA 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 QAA should be reconfirmed Full Member 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 QAA including the preparation of a self-evaluation report;
- A site visit by the review panel to QAA;
- 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 QAA 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 the QAA review.

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

QAA 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 QAA 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

QAA will draw up a draft proposal of schedule of 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 QAA 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 QAA in arriving in Gloucester, United Kingdom.

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

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

QAA 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 QAA website.

5. Budget

QAA 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, QAA 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 QAA 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. Indicative Schedule of the Review

The duration of the evaluation is scheduled to take about 12 months, from October 2012 to September 2013:

Self-evaluation starts	October 2012
Agreement on terms of reference and protocol for review	December 2012
Appointment of review panel members	January 2013
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	February 2013
Self-evaluation completed	March 2013
Briefing of review panel members	April 2013
Review panel site visit	Late April / early May 2013
Draft of evaluation report to QAA	Early July 2013
Statement of QAA to review panel if necessary	July 2013
Submission of final report to ENQA	August 2013
Consideration of the report by ENQA and response of QAA	September 2013
Publication of report and implementation plan	September 2013