

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

**Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE**

July 2019

**1. Background and context**

Turkish Higher Education Quality Board was founded as part of the “Higher Education Quality Assurance Regulation” that entered in force on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2015. The Board was reorganized and renamed as the Higher Education Quality Council (THEQC) according to the Additional Provision No. 35 added to the Law No. 2547 on Higher Education following the enactment of the Law No. 7033 on Amendment of Certain Laws and Executive Orders on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2017. By this law, THEQC has gained both administrative and financial independence. As a result, THEQC has become the only national body responsible for quality assurance in the Turkish higher education system. In this respect, THEQC has become a national authority by law to independently evaluate Turkish higher education institutions. THEQC consists of 13 members, including a student representative. Furthermore, almost all major stakeholders of higher education system of Turkey have representation in THEQC. THEQC’s mission is to enhance the quality assurance system of higher education in Turkey in order to contribute to the continuous improvement of higher education institutions and the achievement of universal competences by individuals. In addition, the vision of THEQC is to be an effective and internationally recognized institution in the field of quality assurance in higher education. In this regard, THEQC aims to implement and enhance the quality assurance processes of the national higher education system by supporting the internal quality assurance system and the progress of quality culture, and conducting the external evaluation of the higher education institutions. Consequently, THEQC can significantly contribute to the enhancement of intellectual capital and sustainable development of the society in a transparent, accountable and collaborative manner. The primary duties of THEQC are: external evaluation of higher education institutions; coordination of the authorization process of national and recognition process of international accreditation agencies; internalization and dissemination of quality assurance culture in higher education institutions.

THEQC contributes to the progress of quality assurance system within HEIs by **requesting Institutional Self-Evaluation Reports (ISERs) on annual basis**. THEQC has also performed the **institutional external evaluation of HEIs** through independent and well-trained as well as experienced external evaluation teams. According to the related rules and regulations, HEIs are required to undergo institutional external evaluation at least once in every five years. The main purpose of institutional external evaluation program is to evaluate processes related to learning and teaching, research and development, and governance system of HEIs. The external evaluation teams prepare Institutional Feedback Reports (IFRs) after their site visits, which are the most valuable output of the external evaluation process of HEIs. THEQC and HEIs publicly announce and share both ISERs and IFRs through their official web pages in terms of transparency principle. As an evidence of internalization of the accountability principle, THEQC identifies strengths and weakness of higher education system by publishing “Annual Situation Reports” through the consolidation of both ISERs

and IFRs. In this Annual Situation Report, THEQC sheds light to the drawbacks as well as the gains/improvements of the higher education system in Turkey from a holistic approach. Every stakeholder of the higher education system can benefit from this report in designing its strategies and policies.

In addition to institutional external evaluation program, THEQC also authorizes or recognizes accreditation agencies operating in the Turkish Higher Education Quality Assurance System. External evaluation services for program accreditation in higher education institutions is conducted by the independent accreditation agencies, which are authorized or recognized by THEQC. In line with its internationalization vision, THEQC recognizes international accreditation agencies as well. During 2019, THEQC builds up mutual collaboration with three international accreditation agencies, which show evidence of compliance with ESG as well as with national standards and principles. Besides, THEQC gave authorization to 11 national accreditation agencies from different disciplines. During authorization and recognition procedures, THEQC looks for compliance of agencies with both national and international standards and principles.

Finally, THEQC arranges activities for the development and dissemination of quality culture in higher education system. In parallel, THEQC provides guidance services, organizes events and engages in various publishing activities that help HEIs to build up a quality assurance culture in higher education system. Organizing trainings, workshops and meetings; distributing guideline documents; publishing Council's e-newsletter; developing "Quality Assurance Management Information System-QAMIS" for HEIs; creating an online platform with training videos and knowledge-base; implementing mentorship program for the HEIs that will undergo institutional external evaluation are among the prominent activities of THEQC. It is also noteworthy to mention the development and usage of a distinctive "QAMIS", which has several interfaces for different users: HEIs, external evaluation teams, accreditation agencies, and the members of THEQC. The QAMIS facilitates procedures, enables monitoring of the improvements over the years for HEIs, and reduces the workload of different users.

As of 2019, there are 207 HEIs in Turkey, and of those 129 are state universities, 73 are foundation universities, and 5 are foundation vocational schools. Currently, all of these institutions comprise of 26.198 programs, 12.628 master's programs, and 5.539 Ph.D. programs. For 2018-2019 academic year, a total of 7.740.502 students were enrolled in HEIs; including 4.420.699 in bachelor's programs, 394.174 in master's programs, and 96.199 in doctoral programs. The current structure of the Turkish higher education system is in compliance with the three-cycle system (bachelor's degree, master's degree, and doctorate degree) introduced by the Bologna Process. Since 2016, all HEIs in Turkey had to prepare their Institutional Self-Evaluation Reports (ISERs) on annual basis as a requisite of quality assurance system (ISERs can be accessed through <http://yokak.gov.tr/raporlar/kurum-ici-degerlendirme-raporlari>). During the last four years, THEQC completed the external evaluation process of 160 HEIs out of 206, and authorized independent national accreditation agencies and recognized international accreditation agencies that show evidence of compliance with ESG as well as with national standards and principles, which were declared on THEQC's web page (<http://yokak.gov.tr/akreditasyon-kuruluslari/akreditasyon-kuruluslari-yetkilendirme-taninma>).

*THEQC has been an affiliate of ENQA since February 2019 and is applying for ENQA membership.*

*THEQC is applying for EQAR registration for the first time.*

## **2. Purpose and scope of the evaluation**

This review will evaluate the way in which and to what extent THEQC fulfils the requirements of *the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*. Consequently, the review will provide information to the Board of ENQA to aid its consideration of whether membership of THEQC should be granted and to EQAR to support THEQC application to the register.

### **2.1 Activities of THEQC within the scope of the ESG**

In order for THEQC to apply for ENQA membership and for registration in EQAR, this review will analyse all activities of THEQC 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 independent of whether the activities are carried out within or outside the EHEA and whether they are obligatory or voluntary.

The following activities of THEQC have to be addressed in the external review:

1. Institutional external evaluation (IEE) of HEIs (based on Institutional Feedback Reports - IFRs), including annual monitoring of internal quality assurance activity of HEIs (based on Institutional Self-Evaluation Reports – ISERs)
2. English Preparatory Schools (EPSs) external evaluation

In addition, the following activities as listed below should be covered in the review (to the extent applicable):

1. Mentorship programme (the activity is pertinent to the agency's application in EQAR in particular referring to the agency's compliance with ESG 3.1 and ESG 3.3. The THEQC's self-evaluation report and the external review report should address the way in which the agency ensures that its mentorship support activities offered to higher education institutions are separated from its external evaluation activities (please refer to Annex 5 of EQAR's Use and Interpretation of the ESG)
2. Annual situation report of the higher education system in Turkey (the activity is relevant in relation to the agency's compliance with ESG 3.4, to the extent THEQC's annual situation reports describe and analyse the general findings of the agency's external QA evaluations)
3. Reviews of HEI within the "mission differentiation and specialization project" of CoHE (regardless of this not being a separate external QA activity, it is an activity undertaken on top of the IEE procedure and should therefore be considered as part of the review, to the extent it concerns aspects related to teaching and learning in higher education)
4. Authorization and recognition of independent accreditation agencies (regardless of this not being an external QA procedure concerning higher education institutions, it is a recognition process of quality assurance agencies. The review should thus address the recognition procedure of quality assurance agencies that are not EQAR-registered referring to THEQC's Criteria for Authorization and Recognition of Accreditation Agencies).

### **3. The Review process**

The review will be conducted following the methodology of ENQA Agency Reviews. The process is designed in line with *the Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and the requirements of *the EQAR Procedures for Applications*.

The evaluation procedure consists of the following steps:

- Formulation of the draft Terms of Reference for the review;
- Finalising the Terms of Reference for the review following EQAR's Eligibility Confirmation (if relevant);
- Nomination and appointment of the review panel;
- Self-assessment by THEQC including the preparation and publication of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit by the review panel to THEQC;
- 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 Board of ENQA and their decision regarding ENQA membership;
- Follow-up of the panel's and/or the Board's recommendations by the agency, including a voluntary progress visit.

#### **3.1 Nomination and appointment of the review team members**

The review panel consists of four members: one or two quality assurance experts (at least one of which is currently employed by an ENQA member agency), an academic employed by a higher education institution, a student member, and eventually a labour market representative (if requested). 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. If requested, the labour market representative may come from the Business Europe nominees or from ENQA. An additional panel member may be included in the panel at the request of the agency under review. In this case, an additional fee to cover the reviewer's fee and travel expenses is applied.

The panel will be supported by the ENQA Secretariat review coordinator who will monitor the integrity of the process and ensure that ENQA's requirements 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 Board of ENQA are not eligible to serve as reviewers.

ENQA will provide THEQC with the list of suggested experts and their respective curricula vitarum 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 THEQC review.

#### **3.2 Self-assessment by THEQC, including the preparation of a self-assessment report**

THEQC 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 THEQC 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 which has four 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 two weeks. In such cases, an additional fee of 1000 EUR 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**

The review panel will draft a proposal of the site visit schedule which shall be submitted to the agency at least two months before the planned dates of the visit. The schedule is to 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 is usually 2,5 days. The approved schedule shall be given to THEQC at least one month before the site visit, in order to properly organise the requested interviews.

The review panel will be assisted by THEQC in arriving in Ankara, Turkey.

The site visit will close with a final de-briefing meeting outlining the panel's overall impressions but not its judgement on the ESG compliance of the agency or the granting or reconfirmation 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 concerning each ESG. A draft will first be submitted to the ENQA review coordinator who will check the report for consistency, clarity and language, and it will be then submitted to THEQC usually within 10 weeks of the site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If THEQC 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 THEQC and finalise and submit the document 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* to ensure that the report will contain sufficient information for the Register Committee for application to EQAR.

For the purpose of applying for ENQA membership, THEQC is also requested to provide a letter addressed to the Board of ENQA outlining its motivation for applying for membership and the ways

in which THEQC expects to contribute to the work and objectives of ENQA during its membership. This letter will be taken into consideration by the Board of ENQA together with the final evaluation report when deciding on the agency’s membership.

**4. Follow-up process and publication of the report**

THEQC will consider the expert panel’s report and will publish it on its website once the Board of ENQA has made its decision. The report will also be published on the ENQA website, regardless of the review outcome and decision by the Board. THEQC 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 Board of ENQA within the timeframe indicated in the Board’s decision on membership. 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 progress 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 to be of particular importance or a challenge to THEQC. Its purpose is entirely developmental and has no impact on the judgement of membership and/or judgment of 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 THEQC is in compliance with the ESG and can thus be admitted/reconfirmed as a member of ENQA. The report can also be used for registration on EQAR, and is designed to serve these two purposes. However, the review report is to be considered final only after being approved by the Board. Once submitted to ENQA and until it is approved by the Board, the report may not be used or relied upon by THEQC, the panel, or any third party and may not be disclosed without the prior written consent of ENQA. The approval of the report is independent of the decision of the ENQA Board on membership.

**6. Budget**

THEQC shall pay the review related fees as specified in the contract between ENQA and THEQC.

It is understood that the fee of the progress 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 of ENQA 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 the travel and subsistence costs related to the second site visit will be charged to the agency.

**7. Indicative Schedule of the Review**

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|---|-------------------|
| Agreement on terms of reference                             | July 2019         |
| Appointment of review panel members                         | August 2019       |
| Self-assessment completed                                   | By 31 August 2019 |
| Pre-screening of SAR by ENQA coordinator                    | September 2019    |
| Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable | October 2019      |

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| Briefing of review panel members   | November 2019 |
| Review panel site visit  | December 2019 |
| Draft of evaluation report and submitting it to ENQA coordinator for pre-screening | February 2020 |
| Draft of evaluation report to THEQC  | March 2020    |
| Statement of THEQC to review panel if necessary                                    | April 2020    |
| Submission of final report to ENQA   | May 2020      |
| Consideration of the report by Board of ENQA                                       | June 2020     |
| Publication of report  | June 2020     |