



European Association for  
Quality Assurance in Higher Education

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Gloucester, 2 November 2021

**Subject: Reconfirmation of AAQ membership in ENQA – the revised Board letter**

Dear Christoph,

I am pleased to inform you that, at its meeting on 21 April 2021, the Board of ENQA agreed to reconfirm AAQ's membership in ENQA for five years from that date. The Board concluded that AAQ is in compliance with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015)* and thus fulfils the membership criteria according to article 6, paragraph 1 of ENQA's Rules of Procedure. Additionally, this letter includes the Board's decision following an independent review of the agency's complaint which was discussed at its meeting on 20 October 2021.

The independent review by the Appeals and Complaints Committee found in favour of AAQ in several areas. The Board accepted these findings and would like to use this opportunity to provide an explanation regarding several standards highlighted by the review panel, which have now changed in light of the independent review of the complaint.

Regarding standard 2.6 Reporting, the Board notes the panel's misinterpretation of the agency's existing practice and safeguarding mechanisms in place for publishing all reports (including the negative ones) at AAQ, and thus agrees the panel's first recommendation should be withdrawn, whereas the second listed recommendation should be categorised as a suggestion for further improvement. Following this, in the Board's view, the standard is considered to be fully compliant.

Related to standard 2.4 Peer-review experts, in the Board's view, the agency already includes a perspective represented by participants of non-degree programmes (i.e., of programmes that fall within the scope of the ESG) in the evaluation panels for these programmes. Therefore, the recommendation as listed under this standard in the external review report is misleading and should be reworded to refer to possible further efforts of AAQ in this regard and be specific to the identified external QA activity of the agency, rather than all of them.

Thirdly, the Board wishes to comment on standard 2.3 Implementing processes, where the Board reiterates the need to include a regular follow-up procedure for all accreditation decisions, not only those with the decisions on accreditation with conditions. The Board finds this to be particularly relevant due to the long approval period of AAQ accreditations.

Last but not least, the Board asks the agency to pay further attention to ESG 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance, where the agency should amend its standards in institutional accreditations and quality audits to ensure that ESG 1.2 Design and approval of programmes and ESG 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment are explicitly considered.

The Board would like to receive a follow-up report within two years of its decision, i.e. by April 2023.

The Board also encourages AAQ to take advantage of the voluntary progress visit – an enhancement-led feature in the review process. The visit would take place in about two to three years' time from this decision. The ENQA Secretariat will be in touch with you in about a year's time to discuss this possibility. The cost of this visit has already been included as part of the review fee and are non-refundable except for the travel costs of the experts. More information about the progress visit can be found in the Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews.

Finally, I would like to apologise for any inconvenience caused to AAQ as a result of the initial findings and the letter of the Board. The Appeals and Complaints committee exists as an important independent safeguard, ensuring processes are fair and transparent. This instance has clearly shown the value of having checks and balances in any review process and is valuable in helping ENQA consider its own quality controls.

If you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact the ENQA Secretariat.

Please accept my congratulations for the re-confirmation of AAQ membership.

Yours sincerely,



Douglas Blackstock  
President



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Annex: Areas for development

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As outlined by the review panel, AAQ is recommended to take appropriate action, in so far as it is empowered to do so, on the following issues:

### **ESG 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance**

The agency is recommended to extend the representation of the labour market representatives at the governance and expert panels' levels.

The agency is recommended to strengthen the stakeholders' involvement into its work and activities and take into account the external perspective at all levels.

### **ESG 3.5 Resources**

The agency is recommended to hire people, first to fill the existing skills gaps and second to make sure that AAQ will be able to carry out all the activities defined by Law in the future in order to guarantee its sustainability, independently of the number of HEI requests.

### **ESG 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct**

The agency is recommended to formalise and develop the feedback mechanisms and to embed them in its internal quality assurance system as a permanent feature.

### **ESG 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance**

The agency is recommended to work in order to have ESG 1.2 and ESG 1.3 explicitly included into its institutional accreditation and quality audit standards and ensure that both standards are systematically assessed.

### **ESG 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose**

The agency is recommended to reflect on the criteria applied and include additional quality-oriented content when identified as necessary, jointly with stakeholders.

The agency is recommended to develop and extend the stakeholders involvement in the design of methodologies by bringing about more discussion opportunities.

The agency and SAC are recommended to increase the professional world involvement at all levels.



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### **ESG 2.3 Implementing processes**

The agency is recommended to include a regular follow-up procedure, not only for decisions of accreditation with conditions, considering the length of the accreditation validity and the lighter second cycle.

The agency is recommended to detail the follow-up procedures in the accreditation guides.

### **ESG 2.4 Peer-review experts**

The agency should invest its efforts and continue to include a perspective represented by participants of non-degree programmes (i.e., of programmes that fall within the scope of the ESG) in the evaluation panels for these programmes.