

Report of the panel of the external review of

**AEQES**

Agence pour l'Évaluation de la  
Qualité de l'Enseignement Supérieur

in the French Community of Belgium

June 2011

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## **Executive Summary**

AEQES was established in 2002 and began evaluations in March 2004. In 2006 it received candidate membership in ENQA. AEQES was reorganized by government decree in 2008, and an external evaluation was stipulated every five years. Both the government and parliament are to receive this evaluation report.

The culture of enhancement and intense dialogue permeates AEQES, and indeed the higher education community. It is this exploratory and constructive approach that is reflected in the internal structure of the agency with its seven Working Groups. AEQES makes no formal decisions; its focus is quality enhancement.

AEQES' engagement with the general spirit of the ESG and ENQA membership provisions was evident to the review panel through the Self-Evaluation Report and the various groups interviewed. Its processes are pertinent to its mission and are well documented.

The review panel examined the Standards in ESG Part 2 and 3. The panel is convinced that AEQES operates in the spirit of the ESG Part 1 but had concerns that the performance indicators it uses for guiding experts on what to evaluate during their site visits were not developed with the ESG in mind. Only one performance indicator looks at the internal quality assurance management at institutions and their programmes. Moreover, the indicators were developed by government and AEQES has only limited influence on changing or adapting them to specific contexts. It is important to note that they are not benchmark indicators as such but a checklist of areas experts should look at in their evaluation. Therefore, the panel found AEQES to be substantially compliant with ESG 2.1 and 2.2. One partial compliance was found with regard to a very weak follow-up process.

As to ESG Part 3, the panel had more serious concerns with only one of them, namely 3.4 relating to AEQES' resources. The amount of financial resources does not allow for any additional activities beyond the core tasks, such as workshops to inform higher education and external stakeholders about quality assurance, and it is owing to the dedication and good management of the head of the Executive Unit that staff can take part in international training events under these circumstances. Human resources are of similar concern, caused by the civil service status of the staff that makes hiring sufficient personnel difficult. The review panel would like to stress, however, that the quality of the existing staff was considered to be excellent by all interview groups where the subject was raised. The consensus culture, and the dedication of AEQES and the head of its Executive Unit, have provided the possibility to initiate changes, but only a structural transformation could provide AEQES with the flexibility to steer its processes better in response to higher education needs and developments. The two standards in Part 3 where the panel found substantial compliance were for ESG 3.6 and 3.7. The panel believes that neither the independence of AEQES' decisions nor its external processes are threatened. However, a stronger separation from the ministry would make AEQES more flexible and responsive to the requirement of implementing a quality culture in higher education in the French Community of Belgium. Moreover, standards to replace performance

indicators, a consequential follow-up mechanism, and students participating in expert panels would make the quality assurance mechanisms more rigorous.

The Panel found full compliance with five of the eight standards in ESG Part 2 and five of the eight standards in ESG Part 3 as well as ENQA criterion 8. It has made a series of recommendations in order to suggest ways of improving the processes and procedures of AEQES.

## Preface

This is the report of the review of AEQES, the agency for the evaluation of higher education quality (Agence pour l'Évaluation de la Qualité de l'Enseignement Supérieur) undertaken in April 2011 for the purpose of determining whether the agency meets the criteria for Full membership of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). The provisions for membership of ENQA are listed in Annex 6.1 to this report.

### 1. Background and outline of the ENQA review process

ENQA's regulations require all Full member agencies to undergo an external cyclical review, at least once every five years, in order to verify that they fulfil the membership provisions.

In November 2004, the General Assembly of ENQA agreed that the third part of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG) should be incorporated into the membership provisions of its regulations. Substantial compliance with the ESG thus became the principal criterion for Full membership of ENQA. The ESG were subsequently adopted at the Bergen ministerial meeting of the Bologna Process in 2005.

The third part of the ESG covers the cyclical external review of quality assurance and accreditation agencies. In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, external cyclical reviews for ENQA membership purposes are normally conducted on a national level and initiated by national authorities in an EHEA State, but carried out independently from them. However, external reviews can also be coordinated by ENQA if they cannot be nationally organised, as this is the case for this agency's external review. In that event, ENQA plays an active role in the organisation of the review, being directly involved as coordinator, whereas, in the case of national reviews, it is only kept informed of progress throughout the whole process.

The external review of AEQES was conducted in line with the process described in the *ENQA Guidelines for External Reviews of Quality Assurance Agencies in the European Higher Education Area* and in accordance with the timeline set out in the Terms of Reference. This review of AEQES had the sole purpose of examining whether it meets requirement of ENQA membership.

The review panel for the external review of the Evaluation Agency was composed of the following members,

- Riitta Pyykkö, Chair, Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council, review panel chair
- Bruno Curvale, Senior Officer, Quality Assurance and Higher Education, Centre international d'études pédagogiques (CIEP)

- Dionyssi Kladis, Professor, University of the Peloponnese, Greece, EUA nominated
- Šime Višić, University of Zagreb, ESU nominated
- Christina Rozsnyai, Program officer, Hungarian Accreditation Committee, review panel secretary

AEQES produced a self-evaluation report (SER) and provided substantial documentation which represented an important portion of the evidence that the panel used to form its conclusions. The panel conducted a site visit to validate the self-evaluation and clarify any points at issue. Finally, the review panel produced the present final report on the basis of the self-evaluation report, site visit and its findings. In doing so it provided an opportunity for AEQES to comment on the factual accuracy of the draft report. The review panel confirms that it was given access to all documents and people it wished to consult throughout the review.

## 2. Glossary

AEQES	Agence pour l'Évaluation de la Qualité de l'Enseignement Supérieur, agency for the evaluation of higher education quality
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
E-day	Expert Day, training day for experts organized by AEQES
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, or European Standards and Guidelines
ESU	European Students' Union
EUA	European University Association
Hautes Écoles	comparable to Colleges or <i>Fachhochschulen</i>
SER	Self-Evaluation Report
SWOT analysis	Exploration and description of an organisation's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
VLIR	Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad, Flemish Interuniversity Council
WG	Working group



### **3. Introduction to the external review of AEQES**

#### **3.1. Reasons for commissioning the review**

AEQES was established in 2002; it was inaugurated in January 2004 and began evaluations in March of that year. In 2006 it received candidate membership in ENQA. AEQES was reorganized by government decree in 2008, which order also stipulated that AEQES would be evaluated every five years to assess its "activities and methods". Both the government and parliament are to receive the evaluation report. A separate government order (5 July 2010) set down the framework for the external review, to be conducted by experts mandated by ENQA and for the purpose of evaluating the organisation and functioning of AEQES.

Apart from the legal requirement to request an external review, the members and staff of AEQES as well as the higher education community were keen to receive feedback on the quality of their activities and to see if the changes made at the agency in 2008 have been helpful in promoting quality in higher education. This eagerness was expressed in the SER (p. 5) of AEQES, where it states, "This self-evaluation followed by the ENQA visit are part of a much wider, continuous and critical process of examining the schemes introduced... ."

AEQES asked ENQA to coordinate the external review, which takes place more than two years after its reorganisation and almost a year after the publication of its first evaluation reports.

#### **3.2. The higher education system in the French Community of Belgium and legal framework for AEQES**

Belgium (French Community) is a signatory of the Bologna Declaration of 1999. Within this framework, however, higher education in the French Community of Belgium is under its own legal structure and separate from that of the country's Flemish- and German-speaking communities.

As described in AEQES' SER, education, including higher education, is governed by so-called Managing Authorities (*Pouvoirs organisateurs*), and the institutions under each authority are grouped into three networks. Those managed by the government and its ministries; those overseen by the public authorities of cities, municipalities, the provinces, and the Brussels Region that are clustered into two coordination bodies; and those administered by private authorities, again grouped under two bodies, for Catholic education and non-denominational schools. Institutions may function only within one of the networks as a guarantee that the education they provide complies with government regulations.

The various types of institutions have their own councils: the Interuniversity Council of the French Community, the General Council for Hautes Écoles, the Council for Higher Education in the Arts, and the Council for Adult Education. Each of them delegates members into AEQES.

Serving the three networks and higher education councils, AEQES is entrusted with enhancing the quality not only of universities but also non-university higher education. Universities provide education in three cycles. These are first-cycle, transition to second-cycle-type bachelor (180 ECTS) programmes; second-cycle master (60 to 240 ECTS) or veterinary (180 ECTS) or medical (240 ECTS) studies; and third-cycle doctoral education (180 ECTS).

A second type of institution offering higher education are the *Hautes Écoles* (colleges or *Fachhochschulen*), the art academies and conservatories, and architectural institutions, which provide first-cycle, transition-type bachelor and master studies and short, professional bachelor studies (180-240 ECTS), and thus training can be theoretical or practical. Both universities and some *Hautes Écoles* also offer specialisations, the former after master studies, the latter for bachelor graduates.

The third kind of higher education institution in the French Community of Belgium is geared toward adult education (*enseignement de promotion sociale*) offered in part-time mode, which may lead to university-equivalent degrees, professional bachelor or master degrees; or certificates of 120 ECTS. Transition between types of schools and programmes is possible with so-called bridges, which are set in legislation.

In the academic year 2009/10 there were 7 universities, 21 Hautes Écoles, 4 Institutes of architecture, 17 higher arts colleges, and 116 adult education institutions.

The 2008 decree on AEQES set down its membership provisions and scope of authority, which will be discussed in detail in the relevant sections of this review report. The agency functions with 24 full members, including the Director-General for Non-Compulsory Education (which includes higher education), each with a deputy.<sup>1</sup> The members and deputies are proposed by the councils of the universities, Hautes Écoles, art academies, and adult education, and by trade unions and the directorate-general for non-compulsory education. They are appointed by the government of the French Community, which also appoints representatives from business, civic society and the arts. Three students and two higher education administrative staff (from a university and an Haute École) representatives are among the full members. They make up the Steering Committee. One representative each from the other two ministries involved in higher education and the head and a staff member of the Executive Unit sit in on the meetings without voting rights.

The Secretariat is the operative arm, consisting of the chairperson and vice-chair of the Steering Committee, the director-general of non-compulsory education and the head of the Executive Unit.

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<sup>1</sup> The order (SER Annex p.5) foresees 25 members with an additional representative from architecture.

### **3.3. Main functions of AEQES**

AEQES conducts *ex post* bachelor and master programme evaluation at universities, non-university higher education institutions, and adult-education institutions. (Permission to launch new programmes is given to institutions *ex ante* by the government.) AEQES does not evaluate third-cycle education, which is organized into doctoral schools usually overarching more than one university and under the oversight of the Scientific Research Fund. Programme evaluation is conducted in clusters of related programmes. They may be one programme offered at different types of institutions; several programmes in related fields taught at a selected type of institution; or several but related programmes provided by different institutions.

AEQES does not accredit the programmes. Rather, its declared focus and legislated mission promotes quality enhancement, and for this reason it publishes evaluation reports not only on the quality of each programme but also so-called transversal reports on the entire educational field and covering all the institutional types that result from the cluster approach.

The culture of enhancement and intense dialogue permeates AEQES, and indeed the higher education community, as emerged repeatedly during the site visit. It is this exploratory and constructive approach that is reflected in the internal structure of the agency with its seven Working Groups. Set up by AEQES mostly from among Steering Committee members – although external members have also been invited into one Group – to elaborate specific processes as needed, the Working Groups' task is to explore and work out strategies and documents for key issues. They are the Communication; Reports; Standards and performance indicators; Experts; Ethics and strategy and the 10-year plan working groups. Additionally, a Self-evaluation Working Group was tasked with guiding the self-evaluation process of AEQES for the external review.

AEQES considers as one of its important roles that it provides a platform for discussion about higher education for the various educational networks and councils, which delegate members into the agency. Given that AEQES constitutes one of the rare formal meeting site for the various actors steering higher education within the French Community of Belgium, the discussions on various cross-sections of higher education contribute to the enhancement of its educational quality.

### **3.4. Engagement of AEQES with ENQA membership provisions and ESG**

AEQES' engagement with the general spirit of the ESG and ENQA membership provisions was evident to the review panel through the SER, including AEQES' Code of Ethics (SER p. 19-20), and the various groups interviewed. Its processes are pertinent to its mission and are well documented. An analysis of compliance with the individual standards and guidelines as well as the ENQA provisions follows in the sections below.

### **3.5. Methodology of the external review of AEQES**

AEQES and ENQA signed a contract and the attached Terms of Reference in November 2010, in accordance with which the external review would be Type A, namely to “evaluate the way in which and to what extent AEQES fulfils the criteria for the ENQA membership and thus the ... ESG” (Terms of Reference p. 1). It was also agreed that the review would be coordinated by ENQA.

ENQA put forward a list of panel members consisting of experts in quality assurance, representatives of higher education and a student in addition to the review secretary. ENQA named three members, the European University Association (EUA) named the institutional representative and the European Students’ Union (ESU) named the student member. AEQES was given the opportunity to check the panel list with curricula vitae to ensure that any conflict of interest was avoided, which the experts also declared in their contracts.

AEQES describes the self-evaluation process in its SER. It established a Self-Evaluation Working Group, which, together with the AEQES Steering Committee, was provided with a presentation of ENQA’s methodology. To receive feedback on its operations, AEQES invited a member of the Quality Assurance Department of the Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad (VLIR). Now a SWOT analysis was done, followed by an action plan “for dealing with any identified weaknesses”. The Steering Committee held a special meeting to discuss the SER produced by the Working Group and finally approved the document (SER p. 5).

The review panel received the SER electronically in early March and subsequently by mail in hardcopy. The package included, in addition to the SER and its appendices; a folder describing AEQES and its activities and methodology; examples of transversal reports; the guides for experts and for the institutional quality coordinator; the agency’s Quality Manual; an activity report 2008-2010; and a report from an international project in which AEQES participated.

The SER was informative, with background to understand the higher education system of the French Community of Belgium and the principles and operation of AEQES, although a glossary of organisations and their abbreviations would have been helpful. In addition to the descriptive parts there were analyses about AEQES practices. A discussion of AEQES’ compliance with all three parts of the ESG followed. The main body of SER concluded with a list of strengths and weaknesses and an action plan. The panel noted that the SWOT analysis and action plan showed, that AEQES has a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and has ideas on how to develop its processes. While the main body of the SER was in English, several of the appendices were in French, primarily the legislation governing AEQES. All the separate other publications were in French. For this reason it was extremely useful and even necessary to have a native French speaker in the panel.

Similarly during the site visit some persons in the interview groups spoke to the panel in French. AEQES offered help with translation but the French panel member helped the other members to understand the main message.

Following a briefing with the panel on the afternoon prior to the site visit, the visit took place at the offices of AEQES on 27-28 April 2011. It was carefully

prepared in communication between the AEQES coordinator and the panel chair and secretary. The panel met over 60 persons in 14 groups that included members and staff of the agency, of ministries and of higher education institutions, students and experts who participated in AEQES evaluations. The employer group consisted of a representative of a school evaluated by AEQES and a city representative where several schools were evaluated. The visit schedule is attached as Annex 6.4.

On conclusion of the site visit, the panel discussed its findings at length and decided on the main issues for the report. It was helped by the evaluation reports, legislation and other documents available in its meeting room at the offices of AEQES.

#### **4. Findings**

Following the site visit the panel has discussed its findings with regard to the current situation of AEQES and its external and internal quality assurance processes. Its views below are the result of this discussion, based on the SER and interviews during the site visit, and were easily agreed on by the panel members. They were impressed with the professionalism of AEQES' operations coupled with willingness for reflection, and the panel's comments and recommendations were made with the intent to ensure sustainability and, indeed, development of the quality assurance processes practiced by AEQES.

In accordance with the ENQA *Guidelines for external reviews* this chapter discusses the findings of the review panel with regard to AEQES' compliance with ENQA criteria together with the corresponding ESG. The additional, "miscellaneous" ENQA criteria follow. Each section looks at the evidence gathered from the SER and the interviews during the site visit; an analysis of the evidence in relation to degree of compliance with the criteria; and a conclusion with the panel's judgment of compliance and, in some cases, recommendations for AEQES.

##### **4.1. ENQA criterion 1 /ESG Part 2: External quality assurance processes**

###### ***ESG 2.1: Use of internal quality assurance processes***

*External quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines.*

###### *Evidence*

It is stated in the SER (p. 12) that the 2008 decree that reorganised AEQES was drawn up with the intent to incorporate the ESG. This is evident in the internal structures of the agency, but less so in the agency's activities for quality assurance of higher education. It was commented in the interview with staff and the self-evaluation group that the awareness of the ESG is new among the Steering Committee and the experts, given the short history of the new agency, but briefing and training sessions are designed to raise awareness about them. Moreover, in the composition of expert panels, quality assurance expertise is

considered. Experts conduct their evaluations by following set performance indicators (a check-list of items to be examined) and not the ESG.

The ESG require quality assurance agencies to check the quality of higher education institutions or programmes by looking at their Policy and procedures for quality assurance; Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards; Assessment of students; Quality assurance of teaching staff; Learning resources and student support; Information systems; and Public information (ESG Part 1).

Helpfully, the SER provides a table (p. 20-21) and a discussion (p. 30 ff.) that compare its performance indicators with the ESG Part 1. The relevant performance indicators cover all areas described in the ESG Part 1. The full list of performance indicators is in Annex 6.2 of this report.

As regards the review of the internal quality assurance mechanisms of institutions, the SER also notes (p. 30) that site visits start with a discussion of quality management at both institutional and department levels and experts are asked to comment on the action plans of institutions. In addition, a range of performance indicators focus on institutional and programme-level quality assurance.

### *Analysis*

The stated aim of AEQES is quality enhancement, and this seems to be in broad agreement with both the lawmakers and the higher education institutions.

AEQES uses performance indicators to evaluate programmes, and the indicators are set down in a government order on AEQES. The rationale for indicators, rather than standards, is that they support quality enhancement and do not check for minimal criteria. In fact, these performance indicators are not indicators as such but a list of areas of investigation by the experts. This leaves open the question in how far AEQES succeeds in improving quality, that is, in raising it to a next level. The answer, to the panel, is clearly that AEQES has succeeded in implanting the notion of quality assurance within higher education institutions and institutions introduced – or identified existing – quality assurance mechanisms. By law, each programme is required to set up internal quality assurance at least to the degree that the performance indicators outline and that they must have a quality committee. The panel believes that this is a good start. Nevertheless, to be sustainable in the future, an ongoing and coherent quality assurance system has to be set up at institutions. That requires a relevant policy – covered only in an overarching way in one performance indicator for “Organisation of quality assurance [management<sup>2</sup>]...” (Indicator 1.6). In accordance with ESG 1.1 AEQES should ensure that institutions have one. While performance indicators may appear friendlier in a voluntary system, standards, which are a clear statement about a quality threshold, are needed to assure sustainable quality and its ongoing development.

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<sup>2</sup> Panel correction for clarification, based on French text

The performance indicators and ESG Part 1 were correlated for the purpose of the external review of AEQES and, indeed, they cover many – but not all – of the issues addressed in the ESG Part 1 (the table is shown in Annex 6.3 of this report). The ESG are not at the foundation of the evaluation process.

### *Conclusion*

The panel **recommends** to AEQES, in its revision of the performance indicators, that it should address in detail ESG Part 1 in the future and take a proactive role in examining the effectiveness of internal quality assurance mechanisms of programmes and higher education institutions. To this end it should initiate a discussion with the government, which is ultimately responsible for the indicators.

AEQES does evaluate quality in its processes and activities but does not at its foundation look at the ESG Part 1. A coherent quality policy or strategy at institutions is not investigated. Therefore, the panel found that AEQES is substantially compliant with ESG 2.1.

### **ESG 2.2: Development of external quality assurance processes**

*The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.*

#### Evidence

The 2008 decree on AEQES sets the framework for internal quality assurance at institutions and external quality assurance by AEQES.

The decree mandates AEQES to conduct evaluations of programmes every ten years. The 10-year plan is reviewed and updated each year with the involvement of the higher education councils. The 10-year plans are published on the website of the agency.

The performance indicators used by AEQES were issued in a government order. The agency may adapt them in agreement with the relevant education councils as they judge necessary to evaluate a particular programme or field, according to the decree (Article 11, SER Annex p. 7), but this must be justified and approved by the government.

The councils representing educational sectors are also involved in the nomination of the expert pools, according to a formula set down in the 2008 decree, and “in consultation with the concerned institutions” (Article 12/5, Annex p. 7). The agency has developed a form that councils ask potential experts to fill out in order to assist with the selection. Experts are selected by the agency from the nominated pool. The subject peers must represent different subjects and at least one “must work outside Belgium” (SER p. 21).

Working groups delegated by the Steering Committee of AEQES have been set up over time with the charge to analyse specific matters relating to the agency's activities and make proposals for developing or improving them.

AEQES publishes, as noted, guidelines for the internal coordinator of an external evaluation at the institution and a guide for experts, in addition to a comprehensive quality manual, on its website and in hardcopy for internal use (SER p. 34).

#### Analysis

The order governing AEQES mandates the councils and other stakeholders to be represented in the Steering Committee of AEQES, therefore it can be said that higher education institutions and stakeholders contributed to the development of the agency's quality assurance processes.

The councils, as representatives of higher education, are involved in reviewing the performance indicators on a case-by-case basis. However, as reported in the interviews and SER, experts and institutions have been finding the performance indicators overly detailed and extensive. AEQES has taken note of the feedback and the list is in the process of revision, conducted by a dedicated Working Group. This Working Group is the only one of currently seven such units with external members, in order to additionally have input from institutions and stakeholders.

The performance indicators are not, as already noted, benchmark indicators but a checklist of areas experts should look at in their evaluation. They are not prescriptive and do not limit AEQES' activities, rather they are very generic and would have to be translated into more operational points of reference for experts to use in their evaluations. Translating them into operational points of reference is currently done by the expert teams without much guidance, which makes the system fragile in terms of consistency.

The 10-year plans, which are rolling schedules on the fields and institutions to be evaluated in the following ten year-cycle, are developed in consultation with the councils, as stated in the SER (p. 12).

The panel was able to ascertain the publications both on the website and in hardcopy, and is satisfied that this criterion is met both with regard to making procedures public and informing about the aims of the processes.

#### Conclusion

Although beyond AEQES' control, the performance criteria were decided by government. On the other hand, AEQES involves higher education stakeholders and experts in adapting the criteria to given settings to some degree, and has initiated discussions to explore how changes can be made possible. In addressing the issue of performance indicators, AEQES must ensure that they are operational and ensure consistency in evaluations. For this reason, the panel believes AEQES is substantially compliant with ESG 2.2.



### **ESG 2.3: Criteria for Decisions**

*Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently.*

#### Evidence

AEQES makes no formal decisions in the sense that its decisions have no formal consequences. Evaluations are seen as part of a process of enhancement of the quality of higher education institutions made within the scope of their autonomy.

The criteria for evaluation decisions by AEQES are the performance indicators, elaborated above. In addition, statistical data is provided to the government, institutions and AEQES on request by an "Observatory" working under the minister, as the head of the observatory stated in the interview. The compilation of data on programmes and institutions is part of the work of the Executive Unit, which supplies it to the experts to use in their evaluations.

Without the availability of standards, evaluation judgment relies heavily on the capabilities of the experts. AEQES provides training for experts in several phases (see section ESG 2.4 below). The training is intended not only to familiarise the experts with the process but to ensure, through a standardised procedure developed by the Executive Unit, that the processes and outcomes are consistent. Consistency of judgment within a field is fostered by the cluster approach, whereby the same pool of experts, with one chair but in different subgroups, evaluates related programmes; and a transversal report by the same expert pool covers the field.

The performance indicators are made available in the beginning of the evaluation process for both the programmes and experts in their dedicated manuals and are discussed in preparatory meetings. The manuals are published on the AEQES website.

Evaluations reports drafted by the experts and with the assistance of the Executive Unit are sent to the evaluated programme to check for factual errors and possible remarks on content.

#### Analysis

AEQES makes no formal decisions in its evaluations. Nevertheless, experts need to make judgments in the statements about the quality of a given programme and the level of objectives attained.

The indicators, coupled with expert training, aim to ensure consistency and transparency about the processes and criteria. Institutions have the opportunity to comment on the evaluation reports, but it is up to the expert panel to adapt the report if it deems it necessary. At any rate, the institution's comments are published together with the report on the AEQES website.

## Conclusion

The review panel **recommends** that AEQES publish its manuals also in English in order to expand the possibility of recruiting from a broader pool of experts in the future and, more importantly, to ensure greater transparency of its processes.

Given that AEQES does not make decisions with formal consequences, and that it publishes its criteria and applies measures to ensure consistency of the findings of its expert groups, the panel considers AEQES fully compliant with regard to ESG 2.3.

### **ESG 2.4: Processes fit for purpose**

*All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.*

#### Evidence

As noted, AEQES does not conduct accreditation; rather, its purpose is to focus on quality enhancement and, especially in this early stage of its existence, to establish trust and disseminate a quality culture at higher education institutions.

The 2008 decree on AEQES (SER Annex pp. 4-9) outlines the agency's tasks, first of all to regularly evaluate the quality of teaching in first- and second-cycle programmes at higher education institutions under the jurisdiction of the French Community of Belgium. The focus is to enhance quality by showing best practices and pointing out problems and by ensuring implementation of internal quality assurance procedures at institutions. In addition, AEQES is charged with providing information on higher education quality to external stakeholders and the government and to contribute to higher education policy (SER p. 13).

On the basis of its legislated tasks, AEQES has developed various sets of procedures for expert selection and guidance, and the review process and its outcomes. In particular Article 16 (SER Annex p. 8) deals with the external requirements, such as that the expert panel is to include at least three academics and one professional, and that similar programmes are to be evaluated with the same group of experts as much as possible. The Article also sets down the annual deadlines for the process. Article 17 (SER Annex p. 9) lists what the external evaluation comprises, namely the analysis of the SER by experts; a visit to the institution; their preliminary report sent only to the institution; and a final synthesis report sent to the agency and including possible comments by the institution. Institutions may refuse publication of the report but must give their reasons, which are published by the agency. The order sets down what must be published on the agency website (Article 18, SER p. 9), and the requirements of a follow-up procedure to be produced by the institution six months after publication of its evaluation report (Article 19, SER Annex p. 9).

As noted, AEQES has no standards, wherefore the consistency of evaluations relies heavily on the quality of the experts themselves and on the assistance of the staff.

Experts are recommended by the higher education councils for the profile of the given evaluation and based on guidelines and a template provided by AEQES (SER Annex p. 21-26). In these documents the requirements for the expert, including knowledge of the field and a quality assurance experience as well as avoidance of any conflict of interest are set down. Expert panels are comprised of at least three academics and a professional from a field related to the profile of the evaluation, not exceeding a third of the total number of experts (Decree, SER Annex p. 8). Experts in pedagogy are increasingly included in the panels. International experts – with a good knowledge of French – are included in the pools; AEQES reported an average of 70% foreign experts in panels in last three years (SER p. 22). Students are not foreseen in the decree. The Steering Committee chooses the panel chairs, who, together with the Executive Unit, assemble the expert pool for the evaluation. The pool is approved by the AEQES Steering Committee. Institutions are given the opportunity to comment. The abstracts of expert CV's are published on the AEQES website to further ensure that there is no conflict of interest between the expert and the institutions to be evaluated.

Experts are provided with background information and instructions in their contracts and the expert manual. This is followed by an extensive day of training on so-called "E-day" (Expert Day), when the process and tasks are described. Council representatives are invited to present the relevant education system and programmes and levels of education to be assessed. The Executive Unit discusses with them the technicalities of the process and a staff member is assigned to guide each evaluation.

Results of an evaluation are the outcome of the experts' findings, discussed in the course of the site visits and in a report-drafting session, where panel members exchange evidence gathered and their conclusions. One of the duties of the staff member accompanying a panel is to take notes throughout the visit and to transmit them to the chair afterwards to be used to back up conclusions.

The stages of the process follow common practice: the evaluated programmes write self-evaluation reports; the expert panels conduct site visits to corroborate the self-evaluations and to gather evidence for their assessments; the reports are published on the AEQES website; and a follow-up is anchored in the system in the 2008 decree, the report of which is also published.

### Analysis

AEQES has a very well documented process for its evaluations that covers all the elements of the process. The key elements are set in the legislation, but AEQES has developed helpful tools for the institutions and programmes undergoing evaluations and the experts conducting them.

The fact that the selection of experts involves the higher education councils was deemed in the interviews to be a positive feature of the process, as it ensures the involvement of higher education while distancing it from the institutions under evaluation. Several instruments are intended to ensure no-conflict-of-interest in this context, including the involvement of international experts, guidelines for the councils and a code of ethics for experts.

The assistance of the Executive Unit in the evaluation process was deemed very professional in the interviews. The focus in the preparatory and report-drafting process is present in meetings and briefings with the experts and in their discussion of issues at hand. Looking at the manual for experts, it seemed to the review panel that it was very elaborate, and in this sense useful, with regard to the technicalities of the evaluation process. It provides less guidance for decision-making, however. Experts noted that they would welcome more information about how the described processes “relate to the work of the experts”. AEQES notes in its SER (p. 21) that it is aware through the feedback requested from its experts that the performance indicators are difficult to use and would need an “interpretation tool”. The Standards and Performance Indicators Working Group is looking into the issue.

Though they are represented in the Steering Committee, students in expert panels are not foreseen in the 2008 decree. In collaboration for a recent international project with the French quality assurance agency Commission des Titres d’Ingénieurs the partner required student participation and AEQES took the opportunity to do include students in that panel. The head of the Executive Unit reported that the Steering Committee would analyse feedback and discuss including students in future panels if possible. Student participation was discussed in many of the interviews with the review panel, with comments ranging from the students not participating when invited to the gradual increase in their attendance as the quality assurance process becomes anchored in the system, to the acknowledgment of the students’ usefulness in contributing their special views on the evaluated programmes. It was clear to the panel from the interview with students that students themselves are not yet aware of their potential in influencing the quality of their education and that additional training focusing on students could help to improve this situation.

With regard to the self-evaluation process it was mentioned in several interviews with higher education representatives that they considered it to be too long. It was also noted, however, that it had originally been foreseen to take one year but that institutions had requested an extension. The result is a two-year period from the initiation of the external evaluation to the issue of the evaluation report. This long duration gives support to the opinion expressed in some interviews that the process should not be repeated too frequently. The panel believes that AEQES could debrief and analyse the difficulties institutions experienced and be proactive in helping institutions to design robust and efficient internal quality assurance mechanisms.

### Conclusion

The review panel noted that AEQES is aware that experts would welcome a more structured toolkit and framework for their evaluations and **encourages** the agency to proceed with these discussions.

The review panel also noted that AEQES is receptive to the issue of including student members in its expert pools. It takes time for students to gain awareness of the possibility and its importance, to recognise that their voices are being heard. To this end, the review panel **recommends** AEQES to intensify its communication toward the students about quality assurance.

Considering that the quality assurance process in the French Community of Belgium is relatively new and the establishment of a quality culture is a key goal, the panel believes that AEQES has created the basic tools for disseminating the quality concept. In addition, the instruments developed by AEQES are believed to fulfil the purpose of making substantiated quality judgments. The panel found that AEQES is in full compliance with the ESG 2.4.

### **ESG 2.5: Reporting**

*Reports should be published and should be written in a style, which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find.*

#### Evidence

AEQES produces two types of reports on its evaluation outcomes: a final synthesis evaluation report (*rapport final de synthèse*) on the programmes in the field evaluated for each institution involved; and a transversal report (*analyse transversale*) on the quality assessment of the evaluated field overall. A follow-up report is produced by each evaluated institution. All three types of reports are published in the agency website.

All reports are required to be published according to the 2008 decree on AEQES. Data that may lead to the ranking of institutions is prohibited, and a separate order of 19 December 2008 specifies the information that may not be published in the final reports.

The evaluation report follows a template provided by AEQES (evidenced in the Manual for Experts and reports on the website). Its section headings follow the main headings of the performance indicators: governance; study programmes; student life; resources; the institutional context; and analysis and strategic plan. Each report summarises the positive and negative findings and makes recommendations. The institution's follow-up report is not only annexed to the evaluation report but links to it are provided in the relevant discussion in the text.

Follow-up reports will be discussed in the next section and the transversal report under ESG 2.8.

#### Analysis

Reporting structure by AEQES seems to the review panel to fulfil the purpose of providing evaluations about the quality of higher education in the French Community of Belgium. This is reinforced by the various levels of analysis foreseen with the different types of reports.

AEQES also notes in its SER (p. 25) that it "insists on [the] collegial structure for the SWOT analysis and for the joint writing of the recommendations." And that the "Swot analysis contained in the report is always compiled on the basis of the findings approved by the whole panel." It came up in several interviews that reports always reflect a consensus opinion of the entire evaluation panel, but it

was also noted that if issues are identified, they are not reflected in the report if the panel does not agree unanimously. The review panel realises that the authors of the report are collectively responsible for its content, which is indeed the case in many countries, however it feels that AEQES should ensure that important issues should not be left out for lack of consensus by the experts. The panel points out that Article 8 of the 2008 order permits the mentioning of "minority notes" when the agency provides advice to the government and wonders if, in developing its internal regulations as stipulated in this Article, the notion could not be extended to expert reporting as well. That would ensure that reports are not diluted for sake of consensus.

The reports seem to be accessible for the intended readership not only via the website but in their format, which is standardised. In its SER, AEQES notes that evaluation reports are addressed to "current and future education stakeholders" (SER p. 25). Students commented in the interviews, however, that reports are difficult to understand. The review panel had the impression that not many students are aware of the reports and do not consult them in selecting an institution for study. Coupled with a more intensive communication towards students, the review panel believes that reports addressed specifically to students would serve to provide accessible information to a key stakeholder group. In this light, the restriction of publishing certain data on institutions and programmes may stand in the way of providing the range of information students may be looking for.

#### Conclusion

The review panel **recommends** that, in concordance with its stepped up communication toward students as recommended in the previous section, AEQES consider producing separate, perhaps summary, reports addressed to students.

Considering that the structure and content of reports and the various levels of analysis with the different types of reports produced by AEQES are informative for their intended readership, the review panel found that AEQES complies fully with ESG 2.5.

#### **ESG 2.6: Follow-up procedures**

*Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently.*

#### Evidence

A follow-up procedure is set into the 2008 decree on AEQES (Article 13, 4, SER Annex p. 7), whereby AEQES requires the programme to submit an action plan six months after the evaluation report to show how it follows the agency's recommendations set down in the experts' evaluation report. In addition, the order of 19 December 2008 also states that higher education institution may request publication of an action plan every three years on the agency website.

AEQES has implemented additional measures to carry out follow-up procedures. For example, they have worked out a template for these reports and they guide institutions in the process.

### Analysis

The legislation of the follow-up procedure reflects the commitment of higher education in the French Community of Belgium, and AEQES, to implement a quality culture at the institutions. This is underlined also on the SER (p. 26). The accountability function of the follow-up procedure is equally important, and recognised as such by AEQES when it states, “the objective of the follow-up phase is to anchor the quality assurance process and make sure that it remains a top priority in the long term” (SER p. 26). It was stated in the interviews that the action plans have to be signed by the rector of the institution, in order to guarantee accountability.

As the first action plans are just coming in, the conclusions of their success are not yet evident. The review panel can comment on the structure of the system however. In this regard it points out that the ten-year cycle of external evaluations is too long to guarantee ongoing quality assurance as a “fact of life” at institutions (the issue will be discussed in greater detail under ESG 2.7). Under these circumstances, the requirement of one follow-up report six months after the institution receives the evaluation report may be useful for stimulating institutions to implement that particular set of recommendations but will not be enough to embed ongoing quality assurance into the system. The discussions in the interviews during the review panel site visit pointed out that while a single follow-up may be required of a given programme, institutions as a whole are involved in quality assurance on an ongoing basis, since different programmes are evaluated in sequence. The review panel believes, however, that while this may be valid for the quality coordinator of the institution, it does not extend to all members of the university community.

Moreover, the panel considers that follow-up reports have no consequences, beyond being published. AEQES has not incorporated the follow-up *process* into its quality evaluation system. The so-called “quality loop”, whereby quality is planned, implemented, checked, and improved on an ongoing basis, is not anchored in the system.

### Conclusion

The panel **strongly recommends** that AEQES develop a follow-up system in its quality assurance structure that ensures that it is an ongoing process in which weaknesses are identified and acted upon. To this end AEQES may need to initiate discussions with the ministry to recommend changing the legal framework.

The review panel considers AEQES to be partially compliant with ESG 2.6.

### **ESG 2.7: Periodic reviews**

*External quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance.*

#### Evidence

Closely related to the follow-up question is the length of the evaluation cycle at AEQES. As mentioned (section 2.2 and elsewhere), the 2008 decree on AEQES mandates it to conduct external evaluations in ten-year cycles.

There is an option for institutions - in the legislation - to produce action plans every three years which can be published on the AEQES website.

#### Analysis

The length of the external evaluation cycle, and concern about losing the momentum gained by the introduction of the concept of quality assurance in higher education in the French Community of Belgium, came up repeatedly in the interviews during the review panel site visit. Most groups interviewed expressed preference for a shorter cycle of four, five or six years. A counter argument was that the ten-year cycle is adequate because institutions need time to implement AEQES recommendations - although this was coupled with the remark that some kind of monitoring to provide feedback to institutions and to ensure that internal quality assurance there is working properly. Moreover, monitoring would be welcome whenever an institution or the system would undergo significant changes.

AEQES itself is clearly aware of the issue, not only discussing it in the interviews with the review panel but noting in its SER (p. 14) that it "is convinced of the necessity to eventually change the length of this 10-year cycle."

It is evident to the review panel that the time is ripe to reconsider the length of its evaluation cycle. AEQES mentioned in the interviews that the first initial follow-up plans are being received and their analysis also with the length of the cycle is foreseen.

#### Conclusion

The review panel **recommends** that AEQES start discussions with institutions and the government about shortening the ten-year cycle of evaluations in order to ensure that quality assurance is ongoing in the higher education system.

Given that external quality assurance is undertaken on a cyclical basis and that the length of the cycle is defined and published, the review panel considers AEQES to be fully compliant with ESG 2.7.



## **ESG 2.8: System-wide analyses**

*Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments etc.*

### Evidence

It was mentioned earlier in this report that the decree on AEQES of 2008 requires it to produce, in addition to the evaluation reports on programmes at each evaluated institution, also a transversal report on the quality of the cluster of programmes or field evaluated. This is to be done – and is done – on an annual basis, covering the previous academic year. In addition, the government may ask AEQES to conduct in-depth analyses of specific indicators.

### Analysis

The review panel found in the SER and the interviews during its site visit that the general mentality at AEQES and its higher education environment focuses on the need for quality enhancement on a system level. The clearly defined process of producing transversal reports, the fact that they are published and sent to the ministry, corroborate this view.

Another example for this attitude is that AEQES has taken the initiative to conduct further analyses when it tasked its Reports Working Group to identify recurring issues from the evaluation reports received so far, with the purpose of sending the results to the government to initiate further discussion if needed (SER p. 25).

In addition to the evaluation and transversal reports AEQES regularly issues, it has been asked to produce a cross-cutting analysis of quality assurance in the French Community of Belgium with a view to its future development. A project has come out of this with quality assurance partners from the Flemish Community of Belgium.

### Conclusion

The review panel considers AEQES to be fully compliant with ESG 2.8. .8.

## **4.2. ENQA criterion 1 /ESG 3.1, 3.3: Activities**

*Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis. The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines.*

### *Evidence*

AEQES conducts programme evaluations at higher education institutions in the French Community of Belgium. Evaluations are done in ten-year cycles, according to a rolling 10-year plan that is updated each year and is published. A pool of experts is selected, from which panels are assigned to specific site visits. The experts are nominated by the higher education councils. The nomination procedure is external to the agency; the agency appoints the evaluation committees on the basis of the proposals made by the councils. The experts conduct their evaluations following performance indicators that are published and receive training for the procedure about both technical aspects and the general background and approach. The indicators and manuals are published on the website of the agency.

AEQES also publishes guidelines for the quality coordinators at institutions with information about the technical aspects of the process and the performance indicators, as well as a detailed description about the self-evaluation process. The Executive Unit of the agency holds meeting sessions for quality coordinators to explain the process also in person.

### *Analysis*

The activities of AEQES are comparable with those of most other quality assurance agencies, with particular regard to quality enhancement. The agency's first evaluation reports were issued about a year ago (SER p. 12), therefore the process is relatively new in the French Community of Belgium. AEQES has established a systematic framework for reviewing its activities through its standing working groups and is open to initiate changes if this is deemed useful for the improvement of the system.

Some weaknesses in the system were discussed in the previous sections under ESG Part 2, and the review panel found that AEQES is in either full or substantial compliance with the standards, with the exception of one partial compliance.

### *Conclusion*

The review panel considers AEQES to be fully compliant with ENQA criterion 1 /ESG 3.1 and 3.3.

## **4.3. ENQA criterion 2 /ESG 3.2: Official status**

*Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.*

### *Evidence*

AEQES in its current form was established by the parliament of the French Community of Belgium and sanctioned by its government in a decree of 22 February 2008<sup>3</sup>, which was annexed to the SER of AEQES (SER Annex p. 4-11). It was published in the official gazette of Belgium (*Moniteur belge*). A predecessor agency existed on the basis of a decree of 14 November 2002.

The objectives, tasks and structure of AEQES are set down in the 2008 decree and have been discussed in the relevant sections of this report.

### *Analysis*

AEQES is clearly operating with a legal mandate and it was obvious to the review panel at the site visit that the members of its Steering Committee and Executive Unit are aware of their legal obligations, which they also convey to the experts they invite to contribute to this task. The institutions the agency evaluates were also conscious of the legal status and obligations of AEQES.

### *Conclusion*

The review panel considers AEQES to be fully compliant with ENQA criterion 2 /ESG 3.2.

## **4.4. ENQA criterion 3 /ESG 3.4: Resources**

*Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes, procedures and staff.*

### *Evidence*

The budget for AEQES operations is provided by government and is linked to the national economic index and adjusted annually. The budget covers the activities of the agency, first of all its external evaluations, for which institutions do not pay. Staff wages are not included in the budget since they are remunerated by the ministry (SER p. 38). For the agency's current activities, the budget was considered to be sufficient in the interviews with the Executive Unit (and stated in SER p. 38). At the same time, it was also stated in the interviews and the SER (p. 38 and referring to p. 14) that the budget does not allow for developmental and broader training activities.

The offices of AEQES are located within Directorate-General of Non-obligatory Education and Research of the Ministry of the French Community, and staff are

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<sup>3</sup> 22 FEVRIER 2008. - Décret portant diverses mesures relatives à l'organisation et au fonctionnement de l'Agence pour l'évaluation de la qualité de l'enseignement supérieur organisé ou subventionné par la Communauté française.

ministry employees. With regard to expenditure this set-up is economical, since the AEQES budget is not burdened with salary and overhead obligations. The legal framework regarding staff poses constraints regarding hiring, which is controlled by the ministry both with regard to staff size and the recruitment process.

AEQES has a staff of six, four programme officers and one assistant, in addition to the head of the Executive Unit. Regarding the workload of the Executive Unit, it is stated in the SER, "Between October 2008 and March 2011 AEQES will have assessed 9 programmes, involving a total of 90 site visits" (p. 37). And according to its 10-year plan, AEQES will have to perform between 53 and 65 per year (SER Annex pp. 39-45). The agency stated in its SER (p. 39) that it considers the Executive Unit to be understaffed, especially considering that they undertake additional developmental activities.

### *Analysis*

The work of the Executive Unit was unanimously praised by the groups interviewed, who described the staff as professional and efficient. But, as reported in the interview with the head of the Executive Unit, while the initial limitation to assign staff to the agency from the existing ministry personnel has been relaxed as a result of discussions with the ministry initiated by the Unit head, its staff, nevertheless, is required to go through the ministry recruitment procedure and it requires prior ministry consent. This poses constraints for the Executive Unit in hiring an adequate number of staff to accomplish its tasks. It also makes the hiring process very cumbersome and lengthy.

In order to fulfil its mission of quality enhancement in the French Community of Belgium, AEQES aims to undertake developmental activities, ranging from additional training for its staff and experts to quality assurance events for the higher education public. It also sees the need for additional types of quality analyses, such as a study of recurring themes in the evaluation reports, and their dissemination. AEQES states in its SER (p. 14) that it is not able to fulfil this part of its mission, expected also by higher education institutions as stated in their interview, for lack of human resources. To augment it, the agency has initiated the recruitment of two additional staff who would be paid from its own budget (SER p. 38-39 and interviews), but this is contrary to budget regulations and requires the approval of the ministry, and hence was stalled at the time of the review panel's site visit.

### *Conclusion*

While the financial resources are sufficient for the agency's core tasks, they do not allow for developmental activities either for institutions and only limited such activities internally. The human resources are insufficient even for the number of evaluations foreseen annually in the 10-year plan.

The restrictions in human resources, both with regard to hiring regulations and number, were a matter of concern to the review panel. On a capacity level, the concern arises in relation to the developmental function of AEQES to ensure dissemination of best practice in quality assurance among its stakeholders.

The review panel considers AEQES to be partially compliant with ENQA criterion 3 /ESG 3.4.

#### **4.5. ENQA criterion 4 /ESG 3.5: Mission statement**

*Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.*

##### *Evidence*

The 2008 decree on AEQES sets down what the agency's mission is (Article 3, SER Annex p. 4). The mission appears, slightly adapted for general comprehension, also on the website of the agency. It lists the basic activities and objectives of AEQES, namely to regularly evaluate study programmes and to collaborate with institutions to highlight best practices and point out problems in order to promote quality enhancement at higher education institutions. Additional responsibilities are to inform the government on quality issues and to contribute to policy relating to higher education quality, as well as to represent the French Community of Belgium on quality matters in international bodies.

For the self-evaluation process for this external review, it was reported that AEQES asked its Ethics and Strategy Working Group to reflect on the agency's mission and to develop a comprehensive mission statement. This mission statement is a seven-paragraph elaboration of the agency's goals and objectives encapsulated within its quality enhancement approach. It has also been published on the website, under the heading "Présentation de l'Agence" (Presentation of the Agency)

##### *Analysis*

The mission statement developed by the Ethics and Strategy Working Group and approved by the Steering Committee very well reflects the spirit of AEQES, in which quality enhancement dominates, while also covering goals and objectives, tasks and activities in relation to higher education institutions and the higher education system.

##### *Conclusion*

The review panel considers AEQES to be fully compliant with ENQA criterion 4 /ESG 3.5.

#### **4.6. ENQA criterion 5 /ESG 3.6: Independence**

*Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.*

##### *Evidence*

The 2008 decree on AEQES declares that it is an autonomous organisation (Article 2, SER Annex p. 4). Its decision-making body is the Steering Committee, whose members are nominated by the higher education councils according to a legislated formula. Representatives from ministries overseeing higher education sit in on meetings but have no voting rights (Article 5, SER Annex p.5).

The agency's facilities are within the building of the Ministry for Non-obligatory Education and Research. The staff of the Executive Unit are civil servants appointed by the ministry.

AEQES receives its budget through the ministry. Its minimum amount is set by decree and the allotment is done via a given formula (Article 22, SER Annex p. 10). It was reported that negotiations with the ministry for additional support for specified purposes are possible. The use of the budget is generally decided internally by the agency.

Experts for external evaluations are nominated by the higher education councils. The order requires them to nominate a minimum of eight experts and institutions to be evaluated have a right to object to a specific expert (Article 16, SER Annex p. 8). The final composition of panels is worked out by the Executive Unit in order to ensure the right balance of members and is decided by the Steering Committee (SER p. 21-22).

To ensure independence, AEQES has prepared a form for the councils to use in the selection of experts, which contain the selection criteria (SER Annex p. 21-26). Experts fill out a contract where they sign a confidentiality clause (SER Annex p. 29), and receive a code of ethics (mentioned in SER Annex p. 34 and elsewhere). International experts are in all expert pools (SER p. 22).

### *Analysis*

The structure of AEQES and the Executive Unit are not separated from the ministry, but while there are many regulations governing that structure and staff appointment takes place through the ministry, the final decisions are internal ones both with regard to the agency's internal operations and the evaluation judgments by the evaluation experts (SER p. 40). It was explained in the interviews that staff requirements are submitted to the ministry by the head of the Executive Unit, who approves their hiring. The ministry representatives within the Steering Committee are in an advisory capacity, and the review panel was convinced from discussions in various interviews that decision-making is not influenced by the ministry or government.

Since its establishment, AEQES has developed its own procedures and methods on the basis of the framework outlined in the decree but in accordance with the requirements of its operations and goals. They are the outcome of intensive internal discussions, often prepared by its operational working groups, and adopted by the decision-making body.

The review panel explored the question of independence in many interviews and was assured in the replies from internal and external groups that independence of decision-making and internal operations are generally considered inherent to the agency. At the same time, the fact that AEQES is located within the ministry

makes it difficult to distinguish from a government organisation in the eyes of some external stakeholders.

Financial independence is set into the order, and the formula for financing is respected so that AEQES can realistically plan its activities in relation to its budget. The review panel believes that the balance between accountability of public funds and budgetary independence is difficult to strike. The fact that AEQES operates under the ministry does pose certain restrictions on the use of specific budget items, however, as was reported by the Executive Unit in relation to participation in staff training abroad, which had to be justified. The panel felt that financial accountability in such detail restrains the development of AEQES, about which the agency itself would be most qualified to decide, as long as it remains within its overall budget capacity.

The review panel was somewhat more concerned about the restrictions on the Executive Unit staff, due their civil servant status and inclusion in the ministry allocation. Discussions in the site-visit interviews revealed that while decision-making and processes are considered to be independent by the stakeholders, the human resources situation is seen as restrictive. (The point was dealt with in depth in section 6.4 with regard to resources.)

The location of the AEQES offices, while not actually impinging on the agency's independence of operations, does seem to have an impact on the image of AEQES in the eyes of some institutional representatives.

### *Conclusion*

The review panel found that AEQES is fully independent in its decision-making and processes and the development of its activities. It believes that the link with the ministry is somewhat restrictive, however, with regard to some budgetary use and is at least cumbersome with the staff hiring procedures controlled by through the ministry.

While the review panel also recognises that AEQES does not feel any threat from the ministry link but enjoys its advantages, it **recommends** that AEQES discuss how it can enhance its image as a fully independent entity in the eyes of higher education institutions and the public.

It **recommends**, moreover, that AEQES initiate discussions with the ministry on the possibilities of separating its staff recruitment and hiring procedures and full budgetary independence beyond the annual budget allocation and financial reporting to ensure accountability of public funds.

The review panel believes that AEQES is substantially compliant with ENQA criterion 5 /ESG 3.6.

#### **4.7. ENQA criterion 6 /ESG 3.7: External quality assurance criteria and processes used by members**

*The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available.*

ii. *These processes will normally be expected to include:*

- *a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process;*
- *an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency;*
- *publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes;*
- *a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations obtained in the report.*

##### Evidence

The stated mission of AEQES is quality evaluation with a focus on quality enhancement; accreditation is not part of the system. To this end it has developed a quality evaluation methodology that encompasses (described in the SER in several places),

- the 10-year plan, which lists the sequence of programmes to be evaluated and is updated each year
- a self-assessment phase, guided by a staff member
- appointment of experts
- training for experts (Experts day)
- preliminary reviews by experts
- site visits where staff, students, graduates and employers from the evaluated programme are interviewed
- a preliminary report submitted for fact-checking to the institution and a summary report on the programme for each evaluated institution with identified strengths and weaknesses and recommendations
- a transversal report analysing the state of the field evaluated with identified strengths and weaknesses and recommendations
- a follow-up plan compiled by the institution within six months of the evaluation report
- an option for the institution to publish follow-up plans every three years on the website of AEQES.



Experts conduct evaluations by looking at the quality of defined aspects of the programmes, set down in so-called performance indicators. These are published in the quality manual for experts and the institutions on the website of the agency and in hardcopy. A staff member follows an evaluation from the preparatory phase to the completion of all reports. Templates and guides as well as trainings for each group are incorporated into the process.

The expert groups include, by law, academics and professionals, also from other countries. Students in expert panels are not foreseen in the law. All reports are published on the agency website.

### *Analysis*

AEQES has a very well developed evaluation methodology and instruments for the different groups the institutions and experts. Adhering to its principle of quality enhancement the processes are supportive; any possibility of ranking is prohibited by law. The guidance of the staff was reported in the interviews to be professional and helpful.

Consistency of evaluation outcomes within a field is ensured by the cluster approach and the training of the experts. However, the panel found, as noted earlier, that the performance indicators are not, in fact, indicators, as the term would imply. Rather, they are a checklist of institutional or program features that experts deal with in their evaluations. Without any benchmark for quality, that leaves quality judgments entirely up to the expert team. Taking the opportunity that the performance indicators are being revised, as noted in interviews with the Standards and Performance Indicators Working Group and others, quality standards, rather than the current checklist of items for experts to look at during their evaluations, would move higher education in the French Community toward sustained improvement of quality.

Students in expert panels are not required by law but as they are not mentioned at all there, AEQES has included a student in a recent international evaluation to which it has contributed, and is analysing the feedback with the aim to possibly introduce student members into panels (SER p. 22 and interviews).

The weakness of the system is the follow-up phase. It requires institutions to produce a follow-up report in which they show actions taken in response to AEQES recommendations, and which report is published on the AEQES website. Beyond this, no methodology has been developed for follow-up. Outside the fact that nothing more has been set into the order, the reason for this provided by AEQES during the site-visit was that, the entire process of external evaluation is relatively new and has concentrated on the initial evaluation phase and that quality assurance is considered the responsibility of higher education institutions.

### *Conclusion*

The review panel believes that AEQES has developed a rigorous external evaluation process and has succeeded, in the early phase of external evaluation in the French Community of Belgium, to install the concept of quality among higher education institutions already with the programmes evaluated so far.

The review panel **recommends** however, that, taking the ESG as its basis, AEQES should arrive at setting standards for quality, against which evaluations could take place. This would aid experts in their judgments, and make them more transparent and consistent by defining what it considers quality, without necessarily having to draw conclusions of non-compliance that it, and the external community, could see as a threat to the quality enhancement approach.

The panel **recommends** that AEQES, in consultation with the councils and ministry, develop a more substantial follow-up process in order to assure ongoing quality assurance in the system.

The panel repeats its recommendation that AEQES include students in its expert panels.

The panel repeats its recommendation in this context to publish the Quality Handbook and the guidelines for experts and for institutions in English.

The review panel believes that AEQES is substantially compliant with ENQA criterion 6 /ESG 3.7.

#### **4.8. ENQA criterion 7 /ESG 3.8: Accountability procedures**

*Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.*

##### *Evidence*

The 2008 decree on AEQES (Article 21, SER Annex p. 9) stipulates that the agency has to undergo external evaluation following the recommendations of ENQA at least every five years.

AEQES has a published set of evaluation criteria and detailed guidelines for those conducting self-evaluation and evaluation. Experts' evaluations are published and while the Steering Committee of AEQES carries responsibility for the consistency of its evaluation reports and to ensure that they are evidence-based, the expert judgments are done by the experts autonomously (SER p. 40).

AEQES has collected feed-back surveys from evaluated programmes and from experts and the Executive Unit analysed their results and presented conclusions to the Steering Committee (SER Annex p. 35-38). These are accessible on the agency website.

In an interview it was noted that at meetings all staff are kept up-to-date on the ongoing evaluations in order to ensure that replacement is in place if needed. New staff training includes their accompanying the full evaluation process of experienced members.

AEQES showed in its SER a structured quality assurance set-up (presented in a graph in the SER p. 41) with external and internal elements. Questionnaires to interviewed students and the higher education councils are foreseen (SER p. 42). Activity reports are published biannually, the initial one for 2008-2010 was presented to the review panel. The outcomes of the external review will be

available on the website together with the agency's SER (indicated on the website).

#### *Analysis*

The review panel was convinced from the evidence gathered that the procedures and decision-making of AEQES are structured and transparent, and that the agency has a keen sense of responsibility and accountability.

In its self-evaluation process for the external review the agency produced an Analysis of its strengths and weaknesses and an Action Plan to correct weaknesses (SER pp. 43-45). The members of AEQES and the Executive Unit showed openness to the recommendations of the review panel that was also evidenced by the fact that a member of the Flemish Interuniversity Council was invited to contribute to the self-evaluation (SER p. 5).

The panel would add one comment with regard to the SER, namely that a glossary of organisations and their abbreviations at the beginning of the text would have been helpful, given the complicated governance system and responsibilities within AEQES.

#### *Conclusion*

The review panel considers AEQES to be fully compliant with ENQA criterion 7 /ESG 3.8.

### **4.9. ENQA criterion 8: Miscellaneous**

*i. The agency pays careful attention to its declared principles at all times, and ensures both that its requirements and processes are managed professionally and that its judgements and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even if the judgments are formed by different groups.*

*ii. If the agency makes formal quality assurance decisions, or conclusions which have formal consequences, it should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of the agency.*

*iii. The agency is willing to contribute actively to the aims of ENQA.*

#### *Evidence and Analysis*

In accordance with the Terms of Reference signed between AEQES and ENQA, the SER did not explicitly deal with ENQA membership criteria only in as much as they overlap with the ESG. It was the panel's task to ascertain during the site visit the commitment of the agency to additional ENQA membership provisions. It was clear from the SER and the interviews with staff that they are actively engaged in international activities, and regularly attend ENQA workshops.

The various sections in this report describing AEQES' principles and processes show that the agency considers its basic values to be at the foundation of its activities. It makes no formal decisions, nevertheless it operates with a sense of accountability toward its stakeholders.

AEQES is a relatively new agency, its first evaluation reports were published only recently. As such it has developed a robust set of procedures and is open to improving them in a dialogue with higher education stakeholders.

AEQES notes in its SER (p. 5) that it considers the ENQA review “much wider, continuous and critical process of examining the schemes introduced”. It is clearly committed to quality assurance as an ongoing undertaking and a responsibility toward its stakeholders.

AEQES is actively contributing to the primary aims of ENQA in that it conducts quality evaluations of higher education programs and promotes quality enhancement of higher education in the French Community of Belgium.

#### Conclusion

The review panel considers AEQES to be fully compliant with ENQA criterion 8.

### **5. Conclusions and development**

The review panel observed the prevalence of a culture of consensus and discussion between AEQES and the higher education stakeholders in the French Community of Belgium. The processes established by AEQES reflect this culture, which, in the view of the panel, is conducive to setting up a quality culture in higher education in dialogue with all stakeholders. On the other hand, the legal framework appeared to the team to be on the other side of the balance in this environment. That may be useful as a counterweight in a process with such diverse players as is the case in this higher education community but seemed to the panel to make the system rigid as far as the development of the process of quality assurance and its adaptation to changing needs and contexts is concerned.

In terms of the ENQA membership criteria, they concern Part 3 of the ESG while Part 2 is relevant in total as far as it connects to ESG 3.1. and 3.3. Therefore, the review panel examined the eight Standards in Part 2 and came to a conclusion about each of them. The panel is convinced that AEQES operates in the spirit of the ESG Part 1 but the performance indicators were not developed with the ESG in mind. Only one performance indicator looks at the internal quality assurance management at institutions and their programmes. Moreover, the indicators were developed by government and AEQES has only limited influence on changing or adapting them to specific contexts. The panel’s substantial compliance judgement for these two standards is made with the conviction that quality assurance is not in essence hampered by these digressions. One partial compliance was found with regard to a very weak follow-up process. Given the great majority of full compliances in Part 2, the panel considered AEQES to be in full compliance with ESG 3.1. and 3.3.

As to the other standards in Part 3, the panel had more serious concerns with only one of them, namely 3.4 relating to AEQES’ resources. The amount of

financial resources does now allow for any additional activities beyond the core tasks. Human resources are of similar concern, caused by the civil service status of the staff that makes hiring sufficient personnel difficult, although it found the quality of the existing staff to be excellent. The two standards in Part 3 where the panel found substantial compliance were for ESG 3.6 and 3.7. The panel believes that neither the independence of AEQES' decisions nor its external processes are threatened. However, a stronger separation from the ministry would make AEQES more flexible and responsive to the requirement of implementing a quality culture in higher education in the French Community of Belgium. Moreover, standards to replace performance indicators, a consequential follow-up mechanism, and students participating in expert panels would make the quality assurance mechanisms more rigorous.

Higher education institutions in the French Community are well on the way to establishing internal quality assurance systems and AEQES has been a key player in this process. The ultimate goal is to develop a quality culture actively involving all stakeholders in the sector on an ongoing basis.

### **5.1. Compliance with ESG Parts 2 and 3**

In light of the documentary and oral evidence considered by it, the review panel believes that, in the performance of its functions, AEQES is not fully compliant with all the ENQA membership provisions. The agency is, nonetheless, in the opinion of the panel, sufficiently compliant to justify full membership of ENQA.

The criteria where full compliance has not been achieved are:

ESG Part 2:

- 2.1: substantial compliance
- 2.2: substantial compliance
- 2.6: partial compliance

ESG Part 3:

- 3.4: partial compliance
- 3.6: substantial compliance
- 3.7: substantial compliance

### **5.2. Recommendations**

In order to support AEQES in aiming for full compliance in all membership provisions the panel has made several recommendations. For easy overview they are summarized in this section.

- The panel **recommends** to AEQES, in its revision of the performance indicators, that it should address in detail ESG Part 1 in the future and take a proactive role in examining the effectiveness of internal quality assurance mechanisms of programmes and higher education institutions. To this end it should initiate a discussion with the government, which is ultimately responsible for the indicators.
- The review panel **recommends** that AEQES publish its manuals also in English in order to expand the possibility of recruiting from a broader pool of experts in the future and, more importantly, to ensure greater transparency of its processes.
- The review panel noted that AEQES is aware that experts would welcome a more structured toolkit and framework for their evaluations and **encourages** the agency to proceed with these discussions.
- The review panel also noted that AEQES is receptive to the issue of including student members in its expert pools. It takes time for students to gain awareness of the possibility and its importance, to recognise that their voices are being heard. To this end, the review panel **recommends** AEQES to intensify its communication toward the students about quality assurance.
- The review panel **recommends** that, in concordance with its stepped up communication toward students, AEQES consider producing separate, perhaps summary, reports addressed to students.
- The panel **strongly recommends** that AEQES develop a follow-up system in its quality assurance structure that ensures that it is an ongoing process in which weaknesses are identified and acted upon. To this end AEQES may need to initiate discussions with the ministry to recommend changing the legal framework.
- The review panel **recommends** that AEQES start discussions with institutions and the government about shortening the ten-year cycle of evaluations in order to ensure that quality assurance is ongoing in the higher education system.
- While the review panel also recognises that AEQES does not feel any threat from the ministry link but enjoys its advantages, it **recommends** that AEQES discuss how it can enhance its image as a fully independent entity in the eyes of higher education institutions and the public.
- It **recommends**, moreover, that AEQES initiate discussions with the ministry on the possibilities of separating its staff recruitment and hiring procedures and of full budgetary independence beyond the annual budget allocation and financial reporting to ensure accountability of public funds.
- The review panel **recommends** that, taking the ESG as its basis, AEQES should arrive at setting standards for quality, against which evaluations could take place. This would aid experts in their judgments, and make them more transparent and consistent by defining what it considers quality, without necessarily having to draw conclusions of non-compliance

that it, and the external community, could see as a threat to the quality enhancement approach.

- The panel **recommends** that AEQES, in consultation with the councils and ministry, develop a more substantial follow-up process in order to assure ongoing quality assurance in the system.

## 6. Annexes

The annexes that follow are intended to provide the key pieces of evidence that served the review panel in its evaluation of AEQES and to provide an overview of the evaluation process. They are

- the ENQA membership provisions
- AEQES performance indicators
- Correspondence between AEQES performance indicators and ESG
- Review panel site visit schedule.

The ENQA membership provisions have been included as a reference for readers, in order to call attention to the benchmarks for the review that include the ESG as well as additional ENQA criteria.

### 6.1. ENQA membership provisions<sup>4</sup>

#### MEMBERSHIP PROVISIONS

##### CHAPTER I. CRITERIA FOR FULL MEMBERSHIP

Full Membership of ENQA is open to quality assurance agencies in the field of higher education from EHEA member states that have been operating and conducting actual evaluation activities for at least two years.

Before being accepted as a Full Member, an applicant agency must satisfy the Board that it meets the eight criteria, listed below. The applicant agency will thereby also meet the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) as adopted by the European Ministers in charge of higher education in Bergen in 2005. The Board may modify the details of the procedures at its discretion.

Each criterion is followed by guidelines (in *italics*) which provide additional information about good practice and in some cases explain in more detail the meaning and importance of the criteria. Although the guidelines are not part of the criteria themselves, the criteria should be considered in conjunction with them.<sup>5</sup>

#### ENQA CRITERION 1 – ACTIVITIES (ESG 3.1, 3.3)

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis. The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

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<sup>4</sup> ENQA, Guidelines for external reviews of quality assurance agencies in the European Higher Education Area, chapter I, Criteria for full membership, pp. 43-45.

<sup>5</sup> For sake of clarity, the ENQA membership provisions additional to the ESG are marked in this report in ***bold italics***.



*The external quality assurance activities may involve evaluation, review, audit, assessment, accreditation or other similar activities and should be part of the core functions of the member.*

**ENQA CRITERION 2 – OFFICIAL STATUS (ESG 3.2)**

Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.

**ENQA CRITERION 3 – RESOURCES (ESG 3.4)**

Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes, procedures **and staff**.

**ENQA CRITERION 4 – MISSION STATEMENT (ESG 3.5)**

Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.

*This statement should describe the goals and objectives of the member's quality assurance processes, the division of labour with relevant stakeholders in higher education, especially the higher education institutions, and the cultural and historical context of its work. The statement should make clear that the external quality assurance process is a major activity of the member and that there exists a systematic approach to achieving its goals and objectives. There should also be documentation to demonstrate how the statement is translated into a clear policy and management plan.*

**ENQA CRITERION 5 – INDEPENDENCE (ESG 3.6)**

Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

*An agency will need to demonstrate its independence through measures, such as:*

- *its operational independence from higher education institutions*
- *and governments is guaranteed in official documentation (e.g. instruments of governance or legislative acts);*
- *the definition and operation of its procedures and methods, the nomination and appointment of external experts and the determination of the outcomes of its quality assurance processes are undertaken autonomously and independently from governments, higher education institutions, and organs of political influence;*
- *while relevant stakeholders in higher education, particularly students/learners, are consulted in the course of quality assurance processes, the final outcomes of the quality assurance processes remain the responsibility of the agency.*

**ENQA CRITERION 6 – EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE CRITERIA AND PROCESSES USED BY THE MEMBERS (ESG 3.7)**

- i. The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available.
- ii. These processes will normally be expected to include:
  - a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process;
  - an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency; publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes;
  - a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.

*Agencies may develop and use other processes and procedures for particular purposes. Agencies should pay careful attention to their declared principles at all times, and ensure both that their requirements and processes are managed professionally and that their conclusions and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even though the decisions are formed by groups of different people. Agencies that make formal quality assurance decisions, or conclusions which have formal consequences should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of each agency.*

**ENQA CRITERION 7 – ACCOUNTABILITY PROCEDURES (ESG 3.8)**

Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.

*These procedures are expected to include the following:*

- i. *a published policy for the assurance of the quality of the agency itself, made available on its website;*
- ii. *documentation which demonstrates that:*
  - *the agency's processes and results reflect its mission and goals of quality assurance;*
  - *the agency has in place, and enforces, a no-conflict-of-interest mechanism in the work of its external experts, Committee/Council/Board and staff members;*
  - *the agency has reliable mechanisms that ensure the quality of any activities and material produced by subcontractors, if some or all of the elements in its quality assurance procedure are subcontracted to other parties;*
  - *the agency has in place internal quality assurance procedures which include an internal feedback mechanism (i.e. a means to collect feedback from its own staff and council/board); an internal reflection mechanism (i.e. means to react to internal and external recommendations for improvement); and an external feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from experts and reviewed*

*institutions for future development) in order to inform and underpin its own development and improvement.*

- iii. a mandatory cyclical external review of the agency's activities at least once every five years **which includes a report on its conformity with the membership criteria of ENQA.***

**ENQA CRITERION 8 – MISCELLANEOUS**

- i. **The agency pays careful attention to its declared principles at all times, and ensures both that its requirements and processes are managed professionally and that its judgements and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even if the judgments are formed by different groups.***
- ii. **If the agency makes formal quality assurance decisions, or conclusions which have formal consequences, it should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of the agency.***
- iii. **The agency is willing to contribute actively to the aims of ENQA.***

## **6.2. Indicative list of performance indicators used by AEQES<sup>6</sup>**

### **Reference list of performance indicators**

Order of the Government of the French Community of 11 April 2008 establishing the reference list of performance indicators in application of Article 11 of the decree of 22 February 2008 on various measures pertaining to the organisation and functioning of AEQES.

#### **Chapter 1 The institution's structure and governance**

1.1. Presentation of the institution

1.2. Organisation and situation of the department to be assessed

1.3. Description of the department's internal organisation (role of the consultation and decision-making bodies and how they function)

1.4. Terms and conditions for student participation in decision-making and advisory bodies

1.5. Institutional partnerships

1.6. Organisation of quality assurance [management<sup>7</sup>] in the institution and department: bodies and their responsibilities

1.7. Support from the institution's administrative department for the quality assurance process

#### **Chapter 2 Structure and aims of the study programme(s) to be assessed**

2.1. Overall and specific objectives

2.1.1. Definition and assessment of the overall and specific objectives of the study course(s) concerned, in relation to the institution's mission and overall objectives

2.1.2. Verification of the procedures for disseminating information to interested parties (staff and students)

2.2. Programme(s)

2.2.1. Procedure for designing a study programme according to the objectives listed under 2.1.1.

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<sup>6</sup> SER Annexes pp. 12-14

<sup>7</sup> Panel correction for clarification, based on French text

2.2.2. Interaction and compatibility, contingent on the programmes, between research and teaching on the one hand and the professional world and teaching on the other hand

2.2.3. Overall compatibility of the programme in terms of base knowledge, specialised knowledge and transferable personal skills

2.2.4. Teaching approach and encouragement of independent and continuous learning

2.2.5. Attitude of the department in respect of student assessment: methods and frequency of assessments (oral or written exams, MCQ, continuous assessment, etc), relevance of the assessment system to programme objectives

2.2.6. Educational objectives and how they are taken into account in projects, reports, end-of-course dissertations; organisation, monitoring and assessment

2.2.7. In the departments concerned: educational objectives and how they are taken into account in work placement(s) (compulsory or recommended) or study periods abroad; organisation, monitoring and assessment

2.2.8. For universities: PhDs and PhD training organisation, monitoring and assessment

2.2.9. Quality measurement: assessment of study programmes and teaching by students; assessment of study programmes by graduates and employers

2.2.10 Effects of quality assessments on the compilation and adaptation of course programmes

2.3. Teacher information and monitoring

2.3.1. Information for students on eligibility and enrolment criteria

2.3.2. Preparatory courses for the first year and participation rates

2.3.3. Information for students, at the different stages of their courses, on available choices, options and specialisation, optional courses, their dissertation, exams, etc.

2.3.4. Measurement of the effective workload of courses, practical work, tutorials, exercises, projects, dissertations, etc. for students

2.3.5. Information on the assessment of students' knowledge

2.3.6. Promoting success: coaching, individual monitoring, remedial help, switching courses, and participation rates

### **Chapter 3 The targets of this study programme/these study programmes**

3.1. Overall context: student population of the French Community of Belgium, in the HEI and in the course

3.2. Qualitative and quantitative information on the recruitment, eligibility conditions, socio-demographic characteristics of student intake

- 3.3. Student numbers (overall, first-time students, repeating students) per academic year or study unit, and per subject, option or specialisation
- 3.4. Quantitative analysis of study careers: "bridges" from other types of HEI, switching courses, etc...
- 3.5. Exam success rate per academic year or department and per subject, option or specialisation
- 3.6. Average study duration
- 3.7. Graduation rate
- 3.8. Career opportunities for graduates, by type of training (sectors, job quality, career paths, etc...)
- 3.9. Information on unemployment and under-employment (where available)
- 3.10. Job placement assistance provided by the institution
- 3.11. Reception and integration of students, new students, foreign students, handicapped students, students with children, etc.
- 3.12. Living and studying conditions for students: facilities available, quality of life, etc.

#### **Chapter 4 Resources available**

- 4.1. Staff and human resource management (HRM)
  - 4.1.1. Qualitative and quantitative data by discipline, subject, etc.: Appropriate allocation of available scientific and technical skills; staff: full-time, part-time, external; collaboration between institutions, faculties, departments, sections, categories, etc.
  - 4.1.2. Age and gender structure
  - 4.1.3. Recruitment policy
  - 4.1.4. Staff management (in the department, within the institution) teacher training, further training, assessment and promotion policy, workload assessment, etc.
  - 4.1.5. Effects of teaching quality assessments on staff policy
- 4.2. Resources and facilities
  - 4.2.1. Operating and investment budgets
  - 4.2.2. Classrooms, labs, libraries, IT infrastructure, etc.
  - 4.2.3. Teaching tools
  - 4.2.4. Appropriateness of resources and facilities to needs

## Chapter 5 External relations

### 5.1. Research

5.1.1. The department's research policy, main research topics, benefits for teaching

5.1.2. Participation in conferences

5.1.3. Research contracts, partners and donors with:

- □ Belgian public authorities (federal, Community, regional), EU, others.
- □ the business sector and society

5.2. Community service

5.2.1. "Service to society" policy priorities, effects on teaching

5.2.2. Appraisals, popularisation of science, education and life-long learning schemes, etc.

5.3. National and international relations (not listed under other headings)

5.3.1. Student mobility: participation in exchange programmes, work placements, etc.

5.3.2. Mobility of academic and research staff: exchange agreements for teachers and researchers, invitations from abroad, participation in conferences and symposiums

5.3.3. Relations with various partners (collaboration projects, bilateral relations, cooperation projects with Africa, companies, other private and public agencies, etc.)

## Chapter 6 Analysis and strategic action plan

6.1. SWOT analysis (Analysis of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats)

6.2. Analysis of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats

6.3. Summary diagnosis on the basis of the above

6.4. Solutions (planned or in the process of being drafted) for remedying identified weaknesses and threats

## Annexes

a. Statistical information

b. Analysis of teaching content, covering all course components. For each one, the number of hours per year or credits (including lectures, practical work, tutorials, personal work), the educational objective, the content, the manner of assessment and the teaching aids used

- c. List of members of staff, with their functions, their teaching tasks and other internal work
- d. List of projects and end-of-course dissertations for the last three years, and of PhD theses for the last 5 years
- e. Departmental rules of procedure (including examination regulations)
- f. Any documents liable to help clarify the content of the report
- g. Activity report or other strategic documents specific to the institution



### 6.3. ESG/AEQES reference list of performance indicators

ESG - Part 1	AEQES reference list of performance indicators
1.1. Policy and procedures for quality assurance	1.4. Terms and conditions for student participation in decision-making and advisory bodies 1.6. Organisation of quality assurance in the institution and department: bodies and their responsibilities 1.7. Support from the institution's administrative department for the quality assurance process 2.2.9. Quality measurement: assessment of programme programmes and teaching by students; assessment of programme programmes by graduates and employers
1.2. Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards	2.2.1 Procedure for designing a study programme according to the objectives listed under 2.a 2.2.9. Quality measurement: assessment of study programmes and teaching by students; assessment of study programmes by graduates and employers 2.2.10. Effects of quality assessments on the compilation and adaptation of programme programmes
1.3. Assessment of students	2.2.5. Attitude of the department in respect of student assessment: methods and frequency of assessments (oral or written exams, QCM, continuous assessment, etc), relevance of the assessment system to programme objectives 2.2.6. Educational objectives and how they are taken into account in projects, reports, end-of-programme dissertations; organisation, monitoring and assessment 2.2.7. In the departments concerned: educational objectives and how they are taken into account in work placement(s) (compulsory or recommended) or study periods abroad; organisation, monitoring and assessment 2.2.8. For universities: PhDs and PhD training organisation, monitoring and assessment 2.3.5. Information on the assessment of student knowledge 2.3.6. Promoting success: coaching, individual monitoring, remedial help, switching programmes, and participation rates Annex b. Analysis of teaching content, covering all programme descriptions. For each one, the number of hours per year or credits (including lectures, practical work, tutorials, personal work), the educational objective, the content, the manner of assessment and the teaching aids used Annex e. Departmental rules of procedure (including examination regulations)
1.4. Quality assurance of teaching staff	2.2.9. Quality measurement: assessment of study programmes and teaching by students; assessment of study programmes by graduates and employers 4.1.3 Recruitment policy 4.1.4. Staff management (in the department, within the institution): teacher training, further training, assessment and promotion policy, workload assessment, etc. 4.1.5. Effects of teaching quality assessments on staff policy 5.1.1. The department's research policy, main research topics, benefits for teaching 5.3.2 Mobility of academic and research staff: exchange agreements for teachers and researchers, invitations from abroad, participation in conferences and symposiums Annex c. List of members of staff, with their functions, their teaching tasks and other internal work
1.5. Learning resources and student support	2.3. Monitoring learning progress 2.3.6 Promoting success: coaching, individual monitoring, remedial help, switching programmes, and participation rates 3.5. Exam success rate per academic year or department and per subject, option or specialisation 3.7. Graduation rate

	4.2. Resources and facilities (especially 4.2.4 for appropriateness)
1.6. Information systems	<p>2.2.9. Quality measurement: assessment of programme programmes and teaching by students; assessment of programme programmes by graduates and employers</p> <p>2.2.10 Effects of quality assessments on the compilation and adaptation of programme programmes</p> <p>3.1. Overall context: student population of the French Community of Belgium, in the HEI and in the programme</p> <p>3.2. Qualitative and quantitative information on the recruitment, eligibility conditions, socio-demographic characteristics of student intake</p> <p>3.3. Number of students per academic year or department and per subject, option or specialisation</p> <p>3.4. Quantitative analysis of study careers: "bridges" from other types of HEI, switching programmes, etc.</p> <p>3.5. Exam success rate per academic year or department and per subject, option or specialisation</p> <p>3.6. Average study duration</p> <p>3.7. Graduation rate</p> <p>3.8. Career opportunities for graduates, by type of training (sectors, job quality, career paths, etc.)</p> <p>3.9. Information on unemployment or under-employment</p>
1.7. Public information	<p>2.1.2. Verification of the procedures for disseminating information to interested parties (staff and students)</p> <p>2.3.1. Information for students on eligibility and enrolment criteria</p> <p>2.3.3. Information for students, at the different stages of their programmes, on available choices, options and specialisation, etc.</p> <p>3.8. Career opportunities for graduates, by type of training (sectors, job quality, career paths, etc.)</p> <p>3.9. Information on unemployment or under-employment</p>

Source: AEQES SER p. 20.

#### 6.4. Review panel site visit schedule



Agence pour l'Evaluation de la Qualité de l'Enseignement Supérieur

#### TIME SCHEDULE

Site visit ENQA peer review panel

Agence pour l'Evaluation de la Qualité de l'Enseignement Supérieur

#### **Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> April** (Arrival at the hotel)

17.00 Private evaluation team meeting in hotel (meeting in the hotel lobby at 16.55)

19.00 Team dinner

#### **Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> April**

8.20 Evaluation team arrive at AEQES offices

8.30-	1	<b>Meeting with head of agency</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coessens Marianne (Chair of the Agency since 1<sup>st</sup> June 2010)</li> <li>• Duykaerts Caty (Head of the Executive Unit)</li> <li>• Wertz Vincent (Vice chairman of the Agency since 1<sup>st</sup> June 2010)</li> </ul>
9.20-9.30		<i>Evaluation team discussion</i>	
9.30-9.55	2	<b>Meeting with the director-general of HE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kaufmann Chantal (Director-general of HE)</li> </ul>
9.55-10.20	3	<b>Meeting with ministry representatives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jauniaux Nathalie (Head of the Higher Education Observatory)</li> </ul>
10.20-10.30		<i>Evaluation team discussion</i>	

10.30-11.20	4	<b>Meeting with self-evaluation committee</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carette Géraldine (Staff officer)</li> <li>• Coessens Marianne (Chair of the Agency since 1<sup>st</sup> June 2010)</li> <li>• Coignoul Freddy (Former Chairman of the Agency from June 2008 to June 2010 - Member of the Steering Committee)</li> <li>• Heinen Elfriede (Member of the Steering Committee)</li> <li>• Lepoivre Philippe (Member of the Steering Committee)</li> <li>• Sursock Andrée (Member of the Steering Committee)</li> </ul>
<i>Evaluation team discussion</i>			
11.30-12.20	5	<b>Meeting with agency committees</b> <i>Ethics and Strategy, Experts, 10-year plan WG</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dangoisse Anne (Member of 10-Year Plan WG)</li> <li>• Heinen Elfriede (Member of Ethics and Strategy WG)</li> <li>• Lepoivre Philippe (Member of Ethics and Strategy WG)</li> <li>• Sursock Andrée (Member of Ethics and Strategy WG)</li> <li>• Duykaerts Caty (Head of the Executive Unit)</li> </ul>
<i>Evaluation team discussion and LUNCH on premises</i>			
13.30-14.20	6	<b>Meeting with agency staff</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carette Géraldine (Staff officer)</li> <li>• Duykaerts Caty (Head of the Executive Unit)</li> <li>• Piret Axelle (Staff officer)</li> <li>• Vermote Alexis (Staff officer)</li> <li>• Marion Michaël (Assistant)</li> </ul>
<i>Evaluation team discussion</i>			
14.30-15.20	7	<b>Meeting with quality coordinators within HE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Canter Sandrine (Institutional Quality Coordinator, Université Libre de Bruxelles)</li> <li>• Falla Marie (Institutional Quality Coordinator, HE Libre Mosane)</li> <li>• Bruyère Caty (Quality Coordinator, HE Condorcet, Commerce extérieur, 2010-2011)</li> <li>• Jamotte Philippe (Quality Coordinator, HE Léonard de Vinci, Instituteur(-trice) préscolaire, 2009-2010)</li> <li>• Kinif Nathalie (Quality Coordinator, HE de la Communauté française en Hainaut, Instituteur(-trice) préscolaire, 2009-2010)</li> </ul>

15.20-15.30		<i>Evaluation team discussion</i>	
15.30-16.20	8	<b>Meeting with HE managers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Duquesne Anne Marie (Directrice de la catégorie économique, HE Lucia de Brouckère, Marketing, 2010-2011)</li> <li>• Hamaide Bertrand (Doyen de la Faculté des Sciences économiques, sociales et politiques, Facultés universitaires Saint Louis, Sciences politiques – Information &amp; Communication – Sociologie, 2009-2010)</li> <li>• Heinderyckx François (Directeur du Département des Sciences de l'Information et de la Communication, Université Libre de Bruxelles, Information &amp; Communication, 2009-2010)</li> <li>• Lambert Pascal (Directeur pédagogique, HE Condorcet, Instituteur(-trice) préscolaire, 2009-2010)</li> <li>• Poulaert Guy (Directeur de l'EPHEC Enseignement supérieur de Promotion sociale, Marketing, 2010-2011)</li> <li>• Van Tiggelen John (Directeur de l'Institut des Hautes Etudes des Communications Sociales, HE Galilée, Information &amp; Communication, 2009-2010)</li> <li>• Verbeke Anne (Directrice de catégorie économique, HE Condorcet, Marketing, 2010-2011)</li> <li>• Zintz Thierry (Doyen de la Faculté des Sciences de la Motricité, Université catholique de Louvain, Kinésithérapie, 2008-2009)</li> </ul>
16.20-16.30		<i>Evaluation team discussion</i>	
16.30-17.20	9	<b>Meeting with employers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fourmanoit Fabrice (HE Condorcet, Instituteur(-trice) préscolaire, 2009-2010)</li> <li>• Van Genechten Dany (HE de la Communauté française en Hainaut Tournai, Instituteur(-trice) préscolaire, 2009-2010)</li> </ul>

18.00 Evaluation team discussion at Hotel

Evaluation team dinner

**Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> April**

## 8.30 Evaluation team arrive at AEQES offices

8.40-	10	<b>Meeting with HE academic staff</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bocca Isabelle (HE de la Province de Liège, Marketing, 2010-2011)</li> <li>Jacquemain Marc (Université de Liège, Sociologie, 2009-2010)</li> <li>Lahaye Anne Catherine (Ecole Supérieure des Affaires, Marketing, 2010-2011)</li> <li>Loir Béatrice (HE de la Communauté française en Hainaut, Instituteur (-trice) préscolaire, 2009-2010)</li> <li>Samain Thierry (HE Galilée, Soins infirmiers, 2010-2011)</li> <li>Toussaint Ivan (Institut Provincial d'Enseignement de Promotion Sociale, Soins Infirmiers, 2010-2011)</li> </ul>
9.30-10.20	11	<b>Meeting with government representatives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Heugens Stéphane (Conseiller Enseignement de Promotion Sociale, Cabinet de la Ministre de l'Enseignement obligatoire, Madame Marie-Dominique Simonet)</li> <li>Roggeman Yves (Conseiller auprès du Cabinet du Ministre de l'Enseignement supérieur, Monsieur Jean-Claude Marcourt)</li> <li>Tollet François (Attaché à la politique générale, Cabinet de la Ministre de l'Enseignement obligatoire, Madame Marie-Dominique Simonet)</li> </ul>
10.20-10.40		<i>Evaluation team discussion</i>	
10.40-11.30	12	<b>Meeting with Agency committees</b> <i>Communication, Standards &amp; performance indicators, Reports WG</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bouchez Arielle (Member of Communication and Reports WG)</li> <li>Heldenbergh Anne (Member of Reports WG)</li> <li>Klein Françoise (Member of Communication WG)</li> <li>Vyt André (Member of Standards and performance indicators WG)</li> <li>Carette Géraldine (Staff officer – Secretariat of WG)</li> </ul>
11.30-11.40		<i>Evaluation team discussion</i>	
11.40-12.30	13	<b>Meeting with Experts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>De Decker Frederik (Expert de l'éducation, Soins infirmiers – Sages-femmes, 2010-2011)</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poumay Marianne (Expert de l'éducation, Marketing – Commerce extérieur, 2010-2011)</li> <li>• Sintomer Yves (Président du comité Sociologie, 2009-2010)</li> <li>• Tondeur Jean (Co-Président du comité Marketing – Commerce extérieur, 2010-2011)</li> <li>• Zehnder Robert (Co-Président du comité Marketing – Commerce extérieur, 2010-2011)</li> </ul>
12.30-13.30		<i>Evaluation team discussion and LUNCH on premises</i>	
13.30-14.20	14	<b>Meeting with students</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fastrez Laurent (Member of the Steering Committee)</li> <li>• Heuschen Jean (Institut Provincial d'Enseignement de Promotion Sociale, Soins Infirmiers, 2010-2011)</li> <li>• Pecheny Valentin (HE Léonard de Vinci, Instituteur(-trice) préscolaire, 2009-2010)</li> <li>• Uwanyiligira Natacha (ISEI, Soins infirmiers, 2010-2011)</li> </ul>
14.20-15.30		<i>Evaluation team discussion to pinpoint preliminary findings</i>	
15.30-16.20	15	<b>Meeting with Agency representatives to present preliminary findings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members of the Steering Committee</li> <li>• Executive Unit of the Agency</li> </ul>
16.20-17.30		<i>Final discussion of evaluation team at AEQES offices to agree outcomes and to discuss main lines of final report</i>	

17.30 Evaluation Team departures