

External review of the Holy See's Agency for the Evaluation and Promotion of Quality in  
Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties (AVEPRO)  
by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

**Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE**

February 2019

**1. Background and Context**

The Holy See's Agency for the Evaluation and Promotion of Quality in Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties (AVEPRO) was established on 19 September 2007 by Pope Benedict XVI. The idea of creating an Agency came from the Holy See's adhesion to the Bologna Process in 2003. The aim was to strengthen the focus on academic quality through the implementation of new tools and procedures suited to current needs. Moreover, as encouraged by the Bologna Process and subsequently by the establishment of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the Agency cooperates with Institutions as part of a common effort to harmonize the various higher education systems.

The Agency is the QA authority for 203 Ecclesiastical Faculties located in Europe and other 78 in the rest of the world (updated 2018), without mentioning other numerous institutions, incorporated, aggregated or affiliated to those Universities or Faculties. Moreover, the Statute of the Agency (art. 4 § 2), foresees that "For any specific exigencies, the Agency, with the consent of the Congregation for Catholic Education, can implement forms of cooperation with other Institutions in order to respond to the demands of different countries or geographical areas". This offers to Catholic Universities, for example, the opportunity (under specific and motivated circumstances) to undergo the evaluation following AVEPRO's model and guidelines.

AVEPRO's mission is to promote and develop a culture of quality within the academic institutions that depend directly on the Holy See and ensure they possess internationally valid quality criteria, as established by the Bologna Process.

AVEPRO's activities are regulated by the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* (8 December 2018) and it conforms to the European Standards and Guidelines , as well as other international agreements concerning rules and procedures for the evaluation of quality in higher education.

Three are the key features of AVEPRO:

1. it is an Agency that has to deal with international and universal dimension because of its nature. All Faculties award the same kind of degrees under the direct authority and in the name of the Holy See which has signed and ratified the four regional/continental Conventions for recognition of UNESCO. Thus these academic degrees are recognized in most countries of the world;
2. in general terms it has to deal with a specific/sectorial branch of knowledge and science and subsequently with a limited number of university disciplines or fields of study. Among those, the "traditional" and most frequent are Theology, Philosophy and Canon Law. In more recent times other (specialized) Faculties have been or can be canonically erected, according to the needs of the Church;

3. its mission is partially devoted to the evaluation of Academic Institutions but a consistent part of its activities are aimed at promoting Quality Culture in the frame of the Higher Education System of the Holy See.

AVEPRO has been a member of ENQA since 2014 and is applying for renewal of membership in ENQA.

## **2. Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation**

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

The review panel is not expected, however, to make any judgements as regards granting membership.

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

In order for AVEPRO to apply for ENQA membership and for registration in EQAR, this review will analyse all activities of AVEPRO that are within the scope of the ESG, i.e. reviews, audits, evaluations or accreditation of higher education institutions or programmes that relate to teaching and learning (and their relevant links to research and innovation). This is regardless of whether these activities are carried out within or outside the EHEA, and whether they are obligatory or voluntary.

The following activities of AVEPRO has to be addressed in the external review:

- Institutional evaluation of Ecclesiastical Faculties and Universities.

## **3. The Review Process**

The process is designed in the light of the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews*.

The evaluation procedure consists of the following steps:

- Formulation of the Terms of Reference and protocol for the review;
- Nomination and appointment of the review panel;
- Self-assessment by AVEPRO including the preparation of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit by the review panel to AVEPRO;
- Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report by the review panel;
- Scrutiny of the final evaluation report by the ENQA Review Committee;
- Analysis of the scrutiny by the ENQA Board and their decision regarding ENQA membership;
- Follow-up of the panel's and/or ENQA Board's recommendations by the agency, including a voluntary follow-up visit.

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

The review panel consists of four members: one or two quality assurance experts, an academic employed by a higher education institution, student member, and eventually a labour market representative (if requested). One of the members will serve as the chair of the review panel, and

another member as a review secretary. For ENQA Agency Reviews at least one of the reviewers is an ENQA nominee (most often the QA professional[s]). At least one of the reviewers is appointed from the nominees of either the European University Association (EUA) or the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), and the student member is always selected from among the ESU-nominated reviewers. If requested, the labour market representative may come from the Business Europe nominees or from ENQA. An additional panel member may be included in the panel at the request of the agency under review. In this case an additional fee to cover the reviewer's fee and travel expenses is applied.

The panel will be supported by the ENQA Secretariat review coordinator who will monitor the integrity of the process and ensure that ENQA expectations are met throughout the process. The ENQA staff member will not be the Secretary of the review and will not participate in the discussions during the site visit interviews.

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

ENQA will provide AVEPRO with the list of suggested experts with their respective curriculum vitae to establish that there are no known conflicts of interest. The experts will have to sign a non-conflict of interest statement as regards the AVEPRO review.

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

AVEPRO is responsible for the execution and organisation of its own self-assessment process and shall take into account the following guidance:

- Self-assessment is organised as a project with a clearly defined schedule and includes all relevant internal and external stakeholders;
- The self-assessment report is broken down by the topics of the evaluation and is expected to contain, among others: a brief description of the national HE and QA system; background description of the current situation of the Agency; an analysis and appraisal of the current situation; proposals for improvement and measures already planned; a SWOT analysis; each criterion (ESG part II and III) addressed individually. All agency's QA activities (whether within their national jurisdiction or outside of it, and whether obligatory or voluntary) will be described and their compliance with the ESG analysed.
- The report is well-structured, concise and comprehensively prepared. It clearly demonstrates the extent to which AVEPRO fulfils its tasks of external quality assurance and meets the ESG and thus the requirements of ENQA membership.
- The self-assessment report is submitted to the ENQA Secretariat who has 4 weeks to pre-scrutinise it before forwarding the report to the panel of experts. The purpose of the pre-scrutiny is to ensure that the self-assessment report is satisfactory for the consideration of the panel. The Secretariat will not judge the content of information itself but whether the necessary information, as stated in the ENQA Guidelines for External Review of Quality Assurance Agencies, is present. For the second and subsequent reviews, the agency is expected to enlist the recommendations provided in the previous review and to outline actions taken to meet these recommendations. In case the self-assessment report does not contain the necessary information and seriously fails to respect the requested form and content, the ENQA Secretariat reserves the right to reject the report and ask for a revised version within 2 weeks. In cases of serious shortcomings or serious disregard to the guidelines of ENQA in this respect, an additional fee of 1000 € will be charged to the agency.
- The report is submitted to the review panel a minimum of six weeks prior to the site visit.

### **3.3 A Site Visit by the Review Panel**

AVEPRO will draw up a draft proposal of the schedule for the site visit to be submitted to the review panel at least two months before the planned dates of the visit. The schedule includes an indicative timetable of the meetings and other exercises to be undertaken by the review panel during the site visit, the duration of which is estimated at 2,5 days. The approved schedule shall be given to AVEPRO at least one month before the site visit, in order to properly organise the requested interviews.

The review panel will be assisted by AVEPRO in the Holy See.

The site visit will close with a final de-briefing meeting outlining the panel's overall impressions but not its judgement on the granting or reconfirmation of ENQA membership.

### **3.4 Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report**

On the basis of the review panel's findings, the review secretary will draft the report in consultation with the review panel. The report will take into account the purpose and scope of the evaluation as defined under articles 2 and 2.1. It will also provide a clear rationale for its findings with regards to each ESG. A draft will be first submitted to the ENQA review coordinator who will check the report for consistency, clarity and language and it will be then submitted to AVEPRO within 11 weeks of the site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If AVEPRO chooses to provide a statement in reference to the draft report it will be submitted to the chair of the review panel within two weeks after the receipt of the draft report. Thereafter the review panel will take into account the statement by AVEPRO, finalise the document and submit it to ENQA.

The report is to be finalised within three months of the site visit and will not exceed 40 pages in length.

AVEPRO is also requested to provide a letter addressed to the ENQA Board outlining its motivation applying for membership and the ways in which AVEPRO expects to contribute to the work and objectives of ENQA during its membership. This letter will be discussed along with the final evaluation report.

## **4. Follow-up Process and Publication of the Report**

AVEPRO will consider the expert panel's report and will publish it on its website once the ENQA Board has made its decision. The report will also be published on the ENQA website, regardless of the review outcome and decision by the ENQA Board. AVEPRO commits to preparing a follow-up plan in which it addresses the recommendations of the review panel and to submitting a follow-up report to the ENQA Board. The follow-up report will be published on the ENQA website, in addition to the full review report and the Board's decision.

The follow-up report will be complemented by a small-scale visit to the agency performed by two members of the original panel (whenever possible). This visit will be used to discuss issues, based on the ESG, considered as of particular importance or challenge by AVEPRO. Its purpose is entirely developmental and has no impact on the judgement of membership and/or compliance of the agency with the ESG. Should the agency not wish to take advantage of this opportunity, it may opt out by informing the ENQA Review Coordinator about this.

## **5. Use of the report**

ENQA shall retain ownership of the report. The intellectual property of all works created by the expert panel in connection with the review contract, including specifically any written reports, shall be vested in ENQA.

The review report is used by the Board of ENQA for the purpose of reaching a conclusion on whether AVEPRO has met the ESG and can be thus admitted/reconfirmed as a member of ENQA. Until it is approved by the ENQA Board the report may not be used or relied upon by AVEPRO, the panel and any third party and may not be disclosed without the prior written consent of ENQA. AVEPRO may thus use the report at its discretion only after the Board has approved of the report. The approval of the report is independent of the decision on membership.

The Chair of the panel shall remain available to respond to questions of clarification or further information from the EQAR Register Committee provided that the ENQA Secretariat is copied in all such requests.

## 6. Budget

AVEPRO shall pay the review related fees as specified in the agreement between ENQA and AVEPRO.

It is understood, that the fee of the progress visit is included in the overall cost of the review and will not be reimbursed in case the agency does not wish to benefit from it.

In the event of a second site visit required by the ENQA Board and aiming at completing the assessment of compliance, and should the agency accept a second visit, additional fees will be charged.

## 7. Indicative Schedule of the Review

Agreement on terms of reference	March 2019
Appointment of review panel members	April 2019
Self-assessment completed	By 15 September 2019
Pre-screening of SAR by ENQA coordinator	By end September 2019
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	September-October 2019
Briefing of review panel members	October 2019
Review panel site visit	December 2019
Draft of evaluation report and submitting it to ENQA coordinator for pre-screening	February 2020
Draft of evaluation report to AVEPRO	March 2020
Statement of AVEPRO to review panel if necessary	March/April 2020
Submission of final report to ENQA	April/May 2020
Consideration of the report by ENQA Board and response of AVEPRO	June 2020
Publication of report	June/July 2020