

Heli Mattisen
Director
Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency (EKKA)

Vienna, 24 June 2013

Subject: Full membership of EKKA in ENQA

Dear Ms Mattisen,

I am pleased to let you know that, at its meeting of 25 April 2013, the Board of ENQA agreed to grant EKKA Full membership of ENQA for five years from 25 April 2013.

On the basis of its scrutiny of the final review report, the ENQA Board agreed that EKKA met the necessary requirements for being granted ENQA Full Membership.

While the report as a whole is favourable, the Board considered that it would be advisable to take into account the recommendations of the Panel, as listed in the Annex to this letter.

EKKA is therefore invited to submit, within two years of this decision, a progress report on the actions undertaken to meet the panel's recommendations. The progress report will also be considered in conjunction with the next external review.

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

Please accept my congratulations to EKKA for being granted Full Membership in ENQA.

Yours sincerely,



Achim Hopbach
President of ENQA

Annex: Areas for development

The Board suggests that, in addition to the other panel's recommendations, EKKA should pay particular attention to the following issues:

- ESG 2.3 criteria for decisions: criteria for decisions for transitional re-evaluations are described in very broad terms, without giving a specific list of which type of judgment by expert committees result in which type of EKKA Council decisions. Decision-making criteria for assessment of study programme groups in the first and second cycles of higher education are not clearly given. There is very limited information on VET, as one of the agency's core function, in English.
 - **Recommendations**: clear decision-making criteria should be identified for both transitional re-evaluations and assessments of study programme groups in the first and second cycle of higher education. The evaluation methodology for accreditation of study programme groups in VET, including criteria for decisions in English, should be publicly available.
- ESG 2.5 reporting: the database with assessment results is only accessible in Estonian. Likewise, some reports are only available in English. An in depth discussion about information needs of different stakeholders has not started yet. Currently, information on quality assessment issues is not communicated clearly for students and other stakeholders. There is lack of transparency in the communication to the public regarding the publication of reports. There does not seem to be a clear policy on language use from the perspective of informing the public.
 - **Recommendations**: information provision, and its transparency, could be improved through cooperation with other structures and agencies in Estonia, but most importantly, with stakeholders themselves. The Agency should ensure the reports reach the intended readership and that the information provided reach local audiences and is sufficient for international partners. Institutional accreditation policies should be clarified as to what, why and how has to be made public in relation to external quality assurance procedures. Information on accreditation process and results in VET should be available on the EKKA website in English.
- ESG 2.6 follow-up procedures
 - **Recommendation**: HEIs could make their improvement oriented measures known to the target audiences in order to increase public accountability and awareness, and to contribute towards the organisational culture of continuous development. These measures could be made public on EKKA website, to complement assessment committee reports and EKKA Council decisions.
- ESG 2.7 periodic reviews: (see ESG 2.3) clear criteria for decisions on transitional re-evaluation are not determined. Currently, the methodology does not give clear terms when the next assessment should be done and no explicit criteria on how this assessment term is established.

- **Recommendation:** the Agency should set clear assessment terms and conditions with respect to quality assessment of study programme groups in the first and second cycles of higher education, and also for transitional re-evaluations. This is to increase transparency of EKKA decision-making procedures and to secure interests of learners.
- ESG 3.4 Resources: in the Development Plan EKKA sets targets for international recognition, among others, to be included in the development projects for the quality systems of third countries.
 - **Recommendation:** EKKA could consider possibilities to take lead in coordination or be more involved in partnerships in other types of international cooperation projects in the field of quality assurance.
- ESG 3.6 Independence: the service term of EKKA Council members is three years, renewable once.
 - **Recommendation:** the Agency could think of introducing a rotation system or other comparable measures assuring that there is a proper balance between new and experienced Council members, assuring smooth execution of their duties.
- ESG 3.7 External quality assurance criteria and processes: there is limited transparency of reports concluded and decisions made in procedures that are not completely “owned” by EKKA – transitional evaluation and re-evaluation, and initial assessment of study programme groups. Decisions issued by the Ministry of Education and Research affect degree granting powers of education providers.
 - **Recommendation:** the Agency should investigate how to increase transparency into the processes of transitional evaluation and re-evaluation, and initial assessment of study programme groups in first and second cycles in higher education in order to secure fair competition conditions and information provision among education providers.
- ESG 3.8 Accountability: the expert reports list the review team members but do not provide information about their background or representation, which makes it difficult for the general public to assess how EKKA follows the principles in forming the assessment committees.
 - **Recommendation:** transparency on how conflicts of interest are avoided could be improved by providing further information on the experts’ background in their reports.