

Professor Nikoletta Paisidou
President
Hellenic Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency (HQA)
44 Syngrou Avenue
P.B. 117 42, Athens, Greece

Dublin, 8 July 2015

Subject: External review of HQA and decision on membership

Dear Professor Paisidou,

I am pleased to inform you that, at its meeting of 16 June 2015, the Board of ENQA agreed that HQA met the necessary requirements for being granted ENQA Full membership for five years from that date.

The Board's decision was based on the review report and the report scrutiny. The Board also considered the further explanations received from the panel on some of the evidence presented in relation to judgements on compliance.

Though the ENQA Board concluded that HQA is in substantial compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines, the Board noted some areas for development, some of them causing serious concern. In order not to jeopardise the outcome of the next external review, your Agency is therefore urged to make the necessary arrangements in those areas.

The Board expects a follow-up report to be based on the recommendations in the review report (as outlined in the attached annex) within two years of the decision, i.e. by June 2017.

Please accept my congratulations to HQA for the positive review outcome and I look forward to a fruitful future cooperation.

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Padraig Walsh (President)

ANNEX: AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

In addition to the panel's recommendations listed in the review report, the Board would like to draw the Agency's attention to the following areas for development:

ENQA Criterion 1– Activities (ESG 3.1, 3.3)

In light of the evidence contained in the report on ESG Part II, this criterion is considered by the Board of ENQA as substantially met.

ESG 2.3 Criteria for decisions

“Evaluation activities are carried out in accordance with uniform criteria, which are published on the Agency's website. [...] HQA is very aware of the issue of consistency in the work of the various expert panels.” [...] there existed some differences in quality across some of the reports. The Agency, [...] has now decided to include in its Standard Guide a series of benchmark requirements, which will need to be addressed by all Panels.

- ➔ Substantial compliance was reported whereas, from the panel's report, the agency fulfills the criterion. Therefore, the Board regards this criterion as fully met and supports the panel's recommendation to „further strengthen its arrangements for ensuring consistency of reporting“.

ESG 2.6 Follow-up procedures

p.24: “Existing procedures (as determined by the law) do not in general provide for direct follow-up procedures. [...] In practice, the unit under review is required to report to the institutional MODIP on progress made with any recommendations. The MODIP is in turn required to make an annual report to HQA on all aspects of its operation, including its oversight of the follow-up on assessments”. The panel recommends that “responsible Greek bodies consider whether full responsibility for consideration of follow-up reports should rest more directly with HQA as part of a more structured and transparent follow up process”.

- ➔ Regarding this standard, the Board's judgement differs from that of the panel. The Board noted a discrepancy between the conclusion of the review panel and the evidence brought forward in the report. Substantial compliance was reported whereas there are no direct follow-up procedures and there is no provision presented for action on any negative findings. Therefore, the Board regards this criterion as partially met. HQA is urged to work for a direct, structured and transparent follow-up process.

ESG 2.7 Periodic reviews

According to the panel's report, there is no provision for cyclical external reviews yet and the periodic evaluations are done by the internal units themselves. De facto, only one cycle of unit and institutional evaluations are (being) completed on the basis of a ten-year-old law, and on the basis of the new, 2011 law, different procedures, i.e. programme accreditation and audit, are planned.

- ➔ Regarding this standard, the Board's judgement differs from that of the panel. The Board noted a discrepancy between the conclusion of the review panel and the evidence brought forward in the report. Substantial compliance was reported whereas some requirements of this criterion are obviously not met, which leads to a finding of partial compliance.

ESG 2.8 System-wide analysis

It is clear from the panel's report that the agency is producing system-wide analysis in various forms.

- ➔ Substantial compliance was reported whereas the evidence provided shows that the criterion is fully met. In the opinion of the Board, the fact that "HQA's human capacity for system-wide analysis is severely constrained" is not an obstacle to grant this criterion full compliance.

Criterion 3 – Resources (ESG 3.4)

in spite of economic recession, the government secured a regular budget for the agency, HQA continues to draw financing from EU projects, is able to take on additional staff seasonally as needed and has been able to plan its new procedures. The panel's report states that the "available budget is sufficient to deliver the basic programme of work". (p.32).

- ➔ The Board regards this criterion as fully met, although the budgetary constraints remain a matter of concern. The Board concurs with the panel to recommend HQA to „develop and pursue the agency's strategy for maintaining and increasing its resources (including those for staffing, finance, hardware and software), in order both to maintain its programme of work and also to develop its capacity for sector-wide analysis“.

Criterion 6 – External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the members (ESG 3.7)

The panel acknowledges on p.37 that "HQA does not however fully meet two aspects of this Standard: Firstly as previously discussed, Greek law does not permit the inclusion of students as members of the review panels.

Secondly, current legislation does not provide for an Appeals system against panel decisions". On p. 21 §47 the panel report states that "student membership is expected for internal evaluations, as well as representation on the Council of HQA itself ". However on pp. 35-36 the report describes the composition of the Council, where no students are mentioned.

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- Substantial compliance was reported whereas students are not involved in site visits and there is no appeals procedure. These are two serious issues. The Agency is advised to promptly address these weaknesses as the revised ESG will be more challenging in terms of student involvement and appeals. In addition, there is no formal external follow-up with respective actions. All this leads to a finding of partial compliance.

Criterion 7 – Accountability procedures (ESG 3.8)

HQA has put a number of measures in place to secure its own accountability. The Board noted that only a formalised internal QA procedure is missing, but internal reflection takes place regularly, including in the bi-monthly Council meetings. Results from external feedback have testified of strong support from the Secretariat for external reviews.

- Partial compliance was reported whereas, in the light of the above, the Board regards this criterion as substantially met.

Criterion 8ii – Miscellaneous

The panel reports that “The Greek QA system has not provided for an appeal mechanism. [...] HQA, conscious of the absence, will inform the Ministry, and it is hopeful that a proper appeal system will be adopted”.

- The agency does not have an appeals procedure in place (see ESG 3.7). Therefore, the Board regards this criterion (8ii) as not met (non-compliant) and its judgement for criterion 8 as a whole is partial compliance.