

Prof. Boyan Biolchev  
Chairman  
National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (NEAA)

Dublin, 20 May 2014

**Subject: External review of NEAA and decision on membership**

Dear Professor Biolchev,

I am writing to inform you of the decision taken by the ENQA Board on 24 April 2014 regarding the membership of NEAA in ENQA.

After thorough consideration and discussion on the final review report, the Board came to the conclusion that the level of compliance of some membership criteria is not sufficient to renew the Agency's full membership. They were particularly concerned about the cases of non-compliance and partial compliance with the ESG.

The Board considered that it would be advisable for your Agency to take into consideration the Panel's recommendations, and give special attention to the following issues:

**- Publication of reports (ESG 2.5)**

The non-compliance with the standard 2.5 was a cause of concern for the Board, especially since this shortcoming had already been pointed out in the first external review conducted in 2008 and there is no legal obstacle to the publication of reports in full. No evidence of progress over the last five years has been seen by the Panel on this area and the final report states that the Agency is not planning to change the policy on publication of reports in the future. The Board concurs with the Panel that *"NEAA, institutional representative bodies and the Ministry of Education and Science should review the current policy of not publishing reports in full and as a priority take the necessary measures to resolve this major deviation from the ESG"* (Panel's report, p.27).

**- System-wide analysis (ESG 2.8)**

The volume of system-wide analysis needs to be substantially increased. This area of activity was found by the Panel to be *"markedly underdeveloped"* (Panel's report, p.32).

**- Involvement of stakeholders (ESG 3.7)**

Since the last external review, *"an amendment has been made to accord full status to student team members. The Panel heard however of some instances where Standing Committees had opted to deploy student members in a slightly different way"*. The Board concurs with the Panel to urge NEAA to ensure greater consistency in its involvement of students (Panel's report p.44 and p.49).

The Board also agrees with the Panel that the involvement of foreign experts and experts from the professional bodies, employers, etc. should be strengthened (Panel's report p.49):

- *"That NEAA further strengthen the involvement of students and representatives of professional bodies as full participants in all stages of the accreditation process".*
- *"NEAA's stakeholder profile outside the higher education sector is limited. NEAA should take steps to deepen the involvement of civil society, in particular of the employment sector, in its activities. In parallel, it needs to develop an approach to effective cross-sector communication, which takes account of the needs of all stakeholders".*

**- Feedback mechanism / accountability procedures (ESG 3.8)**

In addition to the lack of self-reflection in the self-evaluation report (Panel's report §7 on p.6), the Board noted the lack of a comprehensive system of feedback on the agency's activities (Panel's report §84, p.46). In paragraph 84, it is stated that *"the panel has been unable to identify evidence of consistent processes and outputs for: feedback from reviewers, officers and HE education providers on the performance of the reviewers during the review; internal feedback from officials and reviewers working within the agency; feedback from institution and other stakeholders"*.

The Board considered the aforementioned shortcomings not to be in line with the spirit of the ESG and decided to designate NEAA as "ENQA Full member under review" for a period of two years from the 24<sup>th</sup> of April 2014. The Agency will need to undergo a new review process at the end of this period, or sooner, if it wishes. The next review will particularly focus on those elements that were judged to be non-compliant and partially compliant.

If NEAA is dissatisfied with the decision of the ENQA Board, it may file an appeal according to the procedures outlined in article 38 of the Statutes of ENQA.

The Board is confident that the major weaknesses identified in the review can be properly addressed and substantially resolved in the next two years.

Yours sincerely,



Padraig Walsh  
President of ENQA