

## **Annex I: Terms of Reference of the external partial review of Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities (QANU)**

This proposal for a partial review of QANU by ENQA is to agree on Terms of Reference (ToR) that address the request of the agency for a partial review for the purpose of EQAR registration renewal.

### **Chapter 1: Request of QANU**

The application for the renewal of registration by the Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities (QANU) was rejected by EQAR Register Committee, following the decision of 16 November 2017. The EQAR Register Committee judged the agency only achieved partial compliance with a number of standards and thus failed to meet some key requirements of the ESG. Following this decision, QANU decided to undergo a focused review (following EQAR's terminology) addressing issues that led to its rejection, in accordance with article §3.21 of EQAR Procedures for Applications. The review (called 'the partial review' from this point on, following the terminology of ENQA) will be coordinated by ENQA, as requested by the agency on 20 August 2018.

For this purpose, QANU will prepare a report that has two aims: serving as a self-assessment report that the review panel will use as preparation for the partial review (part one of the report), and as a follow-up report as requested by ENQA's Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews (and primarily aimed at the Board of ENQA; part two of the report). According to these Guidelines, each agency is requested to submit a follow-up report usually within two years of the Board's positive decision on membership. In case of QANU, such positive decision was given on 30 November 2016, when ENQA membership was reconfirmed.

Regarding the ENQA follow-up procedure, the 'Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews' state the following:

*"(6.5.1) An agency is requested to submit a follow-up report usually within two years of the Board's positive decision on membership.*

The follow-up report is expected to address the recommendations from the ENQA Board and from the review panel. In addition, the agency may also highlight other developments or changes in the agency's activities and processes that may be relevant in view of its ESG compliance."  
(Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews, article 6.5.1, p. 23).

Furthermore, according to §3.21 of the EQAR 'Procedures for Applications', the agency has the right to undergo a focused review addressing those issues that led to its rejection, and to reapply within 18 months based on that focused review (see EQAR Rejection of the Application by QANU – Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities (QANU) for Renewal of Inclusion on the Register, ref. RC20/A40, point 13).

## **Chapter 2: Content**

The following activities of QANU have to be addressed in the partial review:

1. Assessments of degree programmes;
2. Assessments of research programmes.

EQAR Register Committee decided in November 2017 to reject QANU registration renewal, judging that the agency only achieved partial compliance with a number of standards and thus failed to meet some key requirements of the ESG, with the following specific mentions:

### **ESG 2.4 Peer-review experts**

- In considering assessment of research units/PhD training programmes the panel remarked that the group of external experts do not include a student member. The panel explained that QANU does not assume responsibility for the nomination and selection of expert panel members, but that this is done by the higher education institution concerned.
- In its decision for inclusion (14/05/2011), the Register Committee flagged for attention QANU's selection criteria for assessment committee members. Considering this matter the panel noted that QANU does not have any guidance or formalised procedure concerning the process for the selection and composition of panels.
- The Register Committee formed the view that QANU has not addressed the flag and underlined that the agency has not met one requirement of the standard, namely including a student member in the assessment of research units/PhD training programmes.
- The agency explained in its additional representation that in the selection and composition of panels for degree programmes QANU refers, when necessary, to the NVAO procedure. The requirements for the composition of panels are included in the framework for limited programme assessment, which is used for all assessment programmes in the Netherlands. QANU did not see the need to introduce separate guidelines so as to avoid confusion. The Register Committee considered that there is a consistent approach in the selection of panel members for limited programme assessment and that the framework is in line with the requirement of the standard.
- In the assessment of research units QANU explained that was unable to assume responsibility for the nomination and selection of panel members as the formal framework placed the responsibility with other organisations. While QANU is part of the working group that revises the Standard Evaluation Protocol (SEP) and had argued for including a PhD candidate in the evaluation panels, the requirement was not endorsed. The current version of the SEP will be valid from 2015 to 2021.
- While the Register Committee took note of the explanation provided in the additional representation and acknowledged the attempts made by the agency to introduce students in the assessment of PhD training programmes, the current version of the SEP does not make provision for the involvement of students.

→ Some aspects or parts of this ESG standard have not been met. The reasons listed above lead to a finding of partial compliance with ESG 2.4 by EQAR Register Committee.

### **ESG 2.7 Complains and appeals**

- QANU has a formal procedure in place in case of appeals and complaints regarding the assessment of degree programmes. The panel noted that the board of QANU decides whether an appeal is justified and whether it leads to a revision of the panel's report.
- In case of assessment of research units/PhD programmes the panel noted that QANU has not developed any complaints and appeals procedures. The agency explained that it only saw itself providing a supportive role and that 'institutions are owners of the assessments of research units'.

- The Register Committee was not persuaded by the agency's explanation (see additional representation by QANU) and underlined that a complaints and appeals procedure should be in place, as per the requirement of the standard, for all external quality assurance activities carried out by the agency, therefore also for the assessment of research programmes units / PhD training programmes.
- In its additional representation the agency added that it did not find appropriate to develop an appeals' procedure as the assessments of research units and PhD training programmes do not lead to decisions by QANU. Nevertheless a complaints procedure was developed by the Director for the assessment of research programmes units / PhD training programmes and published by the agency following its external review.
- While the Register Committee noted the newly published complaints for assessment of research units/PhD training programmes, the Committee underlined that the possibility to issue a complaint is not available for assessment of degree programmes and that the new procedure has yet to be externally reviewed by a panel.
- The Committee also underlined the possible conflict of interest in having complaints (in the case of research units/PhD training programmes) and appeals (in the case of assessment of degree programmes) handled by the Board of QANU, instead of an independent complaints and appeals committee.

→ Some aspects or parts of this ESG standard have not been met. The reasons listed above lead to a finding of partial compliance with ESG 2.7 by EQAR Register Committee.

### **ESG 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance**

- In its decision of initial inclusion, the Register Committee flagged for attention the consistent publication of a concise mission statement. While QANU has revised and updated its mission statement the panel found that the mission had not always been systematically translated into action that can guide the agency's daily activities. The Committee therefore concluded that the flag was only partially addressed.
- The panel further noted that stakeholder involvement is not fully ensured as QANU's governing board is mainly formed by academics. Students and employer representatives are not represented in the board.
- In its eligibility confirmation, the Register Committee asked QANU and the review panel to address how the agency ensures a clear separation between its consultancy activities and the agency's assessment procedures. The panel noted that QANU provides consultancy services and writing of critical reflections in order to support its midterm reviews (p. 16-17). The Register Committee was unclear if QANU had policies in place to avoid carrying out consultancy activities and later assessments for the same degree programmes, and have therefore asked the panel to clarify this matter.
- In its clarification response, the panel explained that the agency had no formal, financial or personal connections with any of the institutions it conducts assessment for. While the panel did not refer to any specific regulation or policy on how QANU ensures a distinction between its external quality assurance activities and its other fields of work, the panel was satisfied to learn from its interviews with the agency that there were no overlaps between consultancy and external QA activities.
- In its additional representation QANU stated that its new quality policy will help better connect the mission to the agency's regular activities.
- Considering the involvement of stakeholders in its governance and work, QANU stated its intention to invite representatives of students and employers in one of the Board's annual meetings and that it also considers involving employer representatives in QANU's different activities.
- The agency further explained that its consultancy activities were separated from its regular formal assessments, i.e. the agency would not accept assignment for consultancy activities if there is an

- assessment of the degree programme; staff involved in the degree programme assessment sign a declaration of independence which ensures that if they had been previously involved in a midterm review of a programme they could not act as a secretary in the assessment of the same programme.

→ EQAR Register Committee found that progress in involving stakeholders has not been significant. The intended changes were still in development and they yet have to be implemented and externally reviewed by a panel. The Register Committee therefore decided that QANU is only partially compliant with standard 3.1.

### **ESG 3.4 Thematic analysis**

- In its decision for inclusion, the Register Committee flagged QANU's systematic approach to system-wide analyses.
- While QANU has not produced thematic analysis in its strict sense, the panel noted that the agency published reports at the request of research universities and state of the art reports for programmes that are assessed in clusters. The panel noted that QANU did not have a systematic approach towards producing thematic analysis and that the agency views this activity to remain mainly in the responsibility of NVAO.
- In its additional representation, QANU's underlined that its core activity is to conduct assessments, and due to its limited size, financial resources and scope QANU's ability to conduct thematic analyses in a systematic way was limited. The Board of QANU had nevertheless considered the recommendations of the panel and stated that it would adapt its approach to thematic analysis.

→ Some aspects or parts of this ESG standard have not been met. The reasons listed above lead to a finding of partial compliance with ESG 3.4 by EQAR Register Committee.

To summarise, the following areas will be addressed in the partial review:

- Expert panel composition in assessment of research units/PhD training programmes, including nomination and selection processes (involvement of students, existence of guidelines)
- Complains and appeals procedures
- Stakeholder involvement in QANU's governing board, separation of QANU's consultancy activities and the assessment procedures, translation of mission statement into the agency's daily activities
- Agency's approach to thematic analyses.

**The focus of the partial review shall be therefore the following:**

1. ESG 2.4 Peer-review experts
2. ESG 2.7 Complains and appeals
3. ESG 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance
4. ESG 3.4 Thematic analysis.

The agency is expected to produce a self-assessment report on these points indicating in particular the changes that have taken place since the last full review (in 2016), and addressing specifically to concerns raised in EQAR Register Committee letter on Rejection of the Application by QANU – Quality Assurance Netherlands Universities (QANU) for Renewal of Inclusion on the Register, ref. RC20/A40. In addition, the agency will indicate any eventual changes and developments beyond those listed under the criteria under scrutiny.

The report by the reviewers will concentrate on the same criteria and assess how the compliance has evolved since the last full review (in 2016). It will also assess any eventual changes that have been brought to the attention of the panel in the self-assessment report.

Further to the points listed above, the partial review is expected to discuss all other standards on which the review panel and/or the ENQA Board has made recommendations, demonstrating how the agency has decided to address them. Also, any other significant changes or developments in the agency or its area of operation should be described briefly. The points mentioned under this paragraph should be described in a separate chapter (part two of the report), clearly marking its' purpose for the follow up report for ENQA. The review panel is not expected to give its judgements on compliance on the follow up part of the review.

### **Chapter 3: Panel**

The Board will nominate external reviewers to complete the task.

The composition of the panel for the QANU full review in 2016 was as follows:

<b>Henrik Toft Jensen</b>	Chair (EUA nominee), academic
<b>Maria Weber</b>	Secretary (ENQA nominee), quality assurance professional
<b>André Vyt</b>	Panel member (ENQA nominee), academic
<b>Simona Dimovska</b>	Panel member (ESU nominee)

The proposal is to use **one member** of the panel which carried out the last full review in order to ensure consistency, sufficient background knowledge on the agency, and the external trust in the outcomes (independent of the Board). The two other panel members should be selected so to complement the panel with altogether three viewpoints, that of a student, an academic and a quality assurance professional.

The proposal is to employ:

<b>Maria Weber</b>	Chair (ENQA nominee), quality assurance professional
<b>Vincent Wertz</b>	Panel member (ENQA nominee), academic
<b>Hermann Blum</b>	Panel member (ESU nominee)

One of the two members (the academic or the student) will be appointed as a secretary by the Chair.

The panel members will be asked whether they are willing and able to carry out the work within such timelines (see below).

### **Chapter 4: Timelines**

Terms of Reference and agreement with QANU	By September 2018
Appointment of partial review panel members and agreement on reviewer contracts, setting date for the site visit	September 2018
Completion of partial review SAR	Early december 2018 (with pre-screening in November 2018)
Site visit	End-January 2019
Draft of report to QANU	Late February 2019
Completion of report and submission to ENQA	March 2019
Consideration of the report by ENQA Board and decision	April 2019

## **Chapter 5: Cost<sup>1</sup>**

<b>ITEM</b>	<b>COST</b>
Expert fee chair	€ 2 000
Expert fee	€ 1 500
Expert fee	€ 1 500
Coordination fee ENQA	€ 2 500
Travel and subsistence costs (estimate, full actual cost to be covered by the agency) <sup>2</sup>	€ 2 500
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>€ 10 000</b>

<sup>1</sup> Subject to agreement of the panel members.

<sup>2</sup> Calculation is based on four European return flights, and two nights in a hotel for each expert and ENQA coordinator.