

Director Christoph Grolimund
Swiss Agency of Accreditation and Quality Assurance (AAQ)
Effingerstrasse 15, Postfach
3001 Bern, Switzerland

Dublin, 26 October 2016

Subject: Membership of AAQ in ENQA

Dear Christoph,

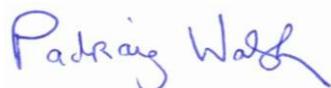
I am pleased to inform you that, at its meeting of 15 September 2016, the Board of ENQA agreed to reconfirm AAQ's membership of ENQA for five years from that date.

The ENQA Board concluded that AAQ is in substantial compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines and the Board would like to receive a follow-up report on the recommendations in the panel report (as outlined in the annex attached) within two years of its decision, i.e. by September 2018.

The Board takes note that the AAQ and the Swiss Accreditation Council have a close link operating together in the HE system, and some parts of the decision-making in quality assurance processes are the responsibility of the Council. In this respect, in the future, it may be more useful to evaluate AAQ's and the Council's operations in conjunction in order to have a more comprehensive picture of the quality assurance system in Switzerland, and to ensure it is operated in substantial compliance with the ESG.

If you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact the ENQA Secretariat. Please accept my congratulations for the re-confirmation of membership of AAQ.

Yours sincerely,



Padraig Walsh
President

Annex: Areas for development

As outlined by the review panel, AAQ is recommended to take appropriate action, so far as it is empowered to do so, on the following issues:

ESG 2.2

It should be communicated with greater force both within the system and to the public that SAR is AAQ's decision-making body. For this, it should be clear from AAQ's guidelines that they are approved and backed by SAR. The same applies to the strategy, the quality paper and other policy documents and reports from AAQ.

With a view to international collaboration, the selection procedure and criteria used to appoint SAR members should be more formalised. The aim should be to structurally, and therefore in a way that is not dependent on individual persons, guarantee the necessary skills of those involved in the procedure as well as the involvement of the relevant interest groups over the long term. The professional world/professional practice should be more strongly involved in the composition of subsequent accreditation councils.

In order to achieve this, AAQ and SAR should, in general, strengthen their links with the professional world/professional practice.

ESG 2.3

With a view to international collaboration, the selection procedure and criteria used to appoint SAR's commission members should be made more formalised. The aim should be to structurally, and therefore in a way that is not dependent on individual persons, guarantee the necessary expertise of those involved in the procedure as well as the involvement of the relevant interest groups over the long term. In addition, it should be made clear in the public presentation of the procedure which role the subject specific commissions play in the individual procedure formats. Professional practice should be better represented in the Commission for Institutional Procedures.

The different roles that AAQ and SAR actually occupy during the individual decision-making process must be presented with greater transparency in the corresponding guidelines.

AAQ and SAR are explicitly encouraged to work on the follow-up processes for all their procedures overall. As part of this, both organisations should also clarify whether experts are to be involved in the follow-up processes and, if so, at which point they should be involved. Finally, the follow-up processes should be described in greater detail in the guidelines in order to better inform higher education institutions about the overall outline of the procedures.

ESG 2.4

The agency's internal standards for selecting and preparing experts should be made consistent across the various different procedure formats. There is potential for development in, for example, the involvement of non-academic perspectives in institutional procedures and of active participants in accreditation procedures in the field of medicine and psychology. AAQ should further invest in the basic preparatory briefing of experts. Editorial discrepancies regarding the selection criteria in the guidelines should be rectified at the next available opportunity.

In order to increase transparency, both the impartiality and independence criteria for experts and the code of conduct should be published consistently. In addition, the "longlist procedure" should be described with the greatest degree of detail in all guidelines so there can be no doubts as to the – established – integrity of the selection of experts.

ESG 2.5

As part of their internal quality assurance systems, AAQ and SAR should devote more detailed attention to the question of consistency and should more explicitly represent the consistency requirements from Standard 2.3 in their internal quality assurance systems.

Guidelines forming the basis for SAR's option to deviate from the expert- recommended decisions should be published.

ESG 2.6

AAQ and SAR should work together with their clients and partners towards cross-procedure systematisation of their publication practice and therefore towards greater transparency. Above all in procedures that are solely AAQ's and SAR's responsibility, the relevant documents and information, including the decisions concerning the follow-up, should be published in a suitable way, e.g. as updates to the existing accreditation reports, through hyperlinks or similar.

The agency is recommended to publish all reports and negative decisions.

ESG 2.7

AAQ and SAR should further develop their complaints procedure. In terms of content, formalised complaints procedures should be established for possible errors in the implementation of procedures and the student perspective should be included in the Appeals Commission. In addition, higher education institutions should receive more transparent information about the options for raising complaints and the criteria for the

composition of the Appeals Commission should be made more formalised, in order to guarantee in the long term through structural measures and therefore independently of individual persons, that those involved in the procedure possess the necessary competencies and that the relevant interest groups are involved.

ESG 3.3

Selection procedures and criteria for the composition of SAR and its commissions should be specified in a binding document in order to further reinforce the organisational independence of SAR and AAQ.

SAR is advised to set down the principles of conduct applicable to it in its own code of conduct or, for example, to adopt AAQ's existing code of conduct and ultimately publish this.

ESG 3.4

The agency should further develop its thematic analyses and should, in future, deal with the follow-up processes for the individual procedure formats more intensively as part of this. International activities should be incorporated into the thematic analyses in a visible way, for example, through planned cross-sectional analyses.

ESG 3.5

Attention should be paid to ensuring that SAR's regulatory duties are fully financed. For this purpose, AAQ and SAR should endeavour to establish clearer separate costing and in future budget plans should report, for example, the material and operational costs for SAR head office separately, taking overhead costs into account (e.g. Assessment of the ESG Internal quality assurance, communication etc.).

In order to ensure the greatest possible degree of planning security for AAQ and SAR, the multi-year plan, which forms the basis for the budget for both institutions, and the strategic planning should be continued. The agency should try to establish additional control options that allow AAQ's activities to be planned on a reliable basis.

The path of organisational development taken by the agency should be continued consistently. The support and cross-departmental functions, including the various database solutions, should be better integrated into the working processes and, if necessary, further developed. In the human resources management plan, options for further education and for more flexible working conditions should be better structured.

ESG 3.6

With the involvement of all relevant interest groups, the internal quality assurance system should be further developed into a cross-format quality assurance system. The strategic planning and its implementation should form an integral part of the internal quality assurance system. The responsibility for the quality of decisions, including for follow-up processes, should be described in a more explicit way. Processes should be developed and serve to maintain the consistency of the decisions.

SAR is advised to set down the applicable principles in its own code of conduct or, for example, to adopt AAQ's existing code of conduct and ultimately publish it.