

Prof. Dr. Petya Kabakchieva
President
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1133 Sofia
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Bern, 12 March 2018

Subject: Reconfirmation of membership of NEAA in ENQA

Dear Prof. Dr. Kabakchieva,

I am pleased to inform you that, at its meeting of 22 February 2018, the Board of ENQA agreed to reconfirm the NEAA membership of ENQA for five years from that date.

The ENQA Board concluded that NEAA is in substantial compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015). 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 February 2020.

The Board would like to specifically highlight the recommendations related to the need of ensuring a wider stakeholder involvement in the agency's governance and work, including foreign and professional experts, as this has been signalled by the panel under several standards of the ESG.

Furthermore, the Board would suggest NEAA to pay specific attention to the ESG 2.6 (Reporting) and encourages NEAA to reconsider its current practice where the Expert Group report is reflected in the Standing Committee's report but not published as such. Even though there are no major differences between the two reports (as confirmed by the review panel), the Board is of the opinion that focus should be given to the panel's findings directly in order to support the philosophy of a peer review.

The Board would also like to express its view on ESG 2.7 (Complaints and appeals). While higher education institutions in Bulgaria have an access to the judicial system to contest the agency's decisions, the Board yet encourages NEAA to consider whether it could introduce an internal step allowing institutions to question the formal outcomes with the agency first before taking legal action.

In addition, the Board encourages you to take advantage of the voluntary progress visit – a new enhancement-led feature in the review process. The visit would take place after the submission of the follow-up report, in about two years' time from this decision. The ENQA Secretariat will be in touch with you in about a year's time to discuss this possibility. The costs of this visit have already been included as part of the review fee and are non-refundable except for the travel costs of the experts. More information about the progress visit can be found in the [Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews](#).

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 NEAA.

Yours sincerely,



Christoph Grolimund
President

Annex: Areas for development

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

ESG 3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

NEAA is recommended to thoroughly support its comprehensive, complex operations while revising the current strategic plan in the upcoming period. The revised strategic plan should especially allow the Accreditation Council (in cooperation with the General Secretary) to streamline resources, operations in an effective and efficient manner while reflecting the agency's mission.

NEAA is recommended to consider expanding its Accreditation Council to ensure a wider stakeholder involvement in agency's governance. If this would need a legal change, NEAA should pro-actively map possible ways forward and take into consideration experience from reconstruction of its Standing Committees, which now e.g. includes student members. Additionally, NEAA should strive for at least formalised procedures regarding the now ad-hoc consultations of stakeholders on a working level by Accreditation Council.

ESG 3.5 Resources

NEAA is recommended to put processes in place aiming to develop staff competences further, regarding the needs for being Quality Assurance professionals.

ESG 2.4 Peer-review experts

Following-up on a recommendation issued during the last ENQA review, NEAA is recommended to accelerate the development of strategies for the involvement of foreign experts and other constituencies (e.g. business, professional bodies and employers) in its procedures. This task, of course, requires efforts of all stakeholders involved (Ministry of Education and Science, Higher Education Institutions).

ESG 2.6 Reporting

NEAA is recommended to reconsider its current practice in place according to which the Expert Group report is only reflected in the Standing Committee's report (and not being published as such).

ESG 2.7 Complaints and appeals

NEAA is recommended to reconsider and clarify the role of its Appeals Committee as a Complaints Committee, especially as students complaints are involved, and to communicate in a transparent way to third parties the complaints and appeals procedures that are available, notably on its website.