

Annex I: Terms of Reference for a focused review of the Academic Information Centre (AIC)

This document is to agree on the Terms of Reference (ToR) that address the request of the Academic Information Centre (AIC), Latvia, to undergo a focused review against the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The request follows EQAR Register Committee's decision to reject the application by AIC (Ref. RC41/A133, 12 December 2023, annex I to this document).

Chapter 1: Background and request of AIC for a focused review

AIC approached ENQA to coordinate a focused review addressing those issues that led to the rejection of the agency's application for inclusion on the Register. EQAR's 'Procedures for Applications' (§3.21) allow the agency to undergo such a focused review, and to reapply within 18 months based on this review.

Subsequently, on 9 May 2024 AIC approached ENQA to coordinate the abovementioned focused review and prepare a review report that will be considered for the purpose of EQAR-registration. On 27 May 2024, ENQA agreed to coordinate the focused review. The review follows ENQA methodology for partial reviews (see ENQA Rules of Procedure, article 7, and ENQA's policy on partial reviews of members under review) that is aligned with the requirements of a focused review for the purposes of EQAR-registration. In case of provisions not covered by ENQA's policy on partial reviews of members under review, the Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews (for full reviews) are to be followed.

Chapter 2: Purpose and scope of the focused review

Chapter 2.1: Activities within the scope of the ESG

The focused review will address the above mentioned ESG standards through the following external QA activities of AIC:

1. Accreditation of higher education institution
2. Assessment and accreditation of a study field
3. Licensing of study programme
4. Accreditation of study programmes abroad

The following activities are considered to be outside of the scope of the ESG as they do not cover provisions on EHEA QF level 6-8, unless the panel comes across new evidence that proves otherwise¹:

1. Inclusion of a licensed study programme on the accreditation form of study field (i.e., the activity that was included in the agency's full review against the ESG in 2023 but was removed from the agency's portfolio of activities following the changes to Cabinet Regulation No. 793 "Regulations Regarding Opening and Accreditation of Study Fields" (subpoints 1.1., 1.2 and 1.5) that will be in force as of 1st September 2024).
2. Assessment of feasibility on changes in study fields (i.e. study programmes) where the EQAR Register Committee in its decision Ref. RC41/A133 from 12.12.2023 noted that "this is not an activity within the scope of the ESG and has thus not considered it in its assessment of AIC's compliance with the ESG".

¹ Should this be the case, the coordinator is expected to inform EQAR at the earliest convenience and request an amendment of the terms of reference.

Should any substantive changes occur in AIC between now and the review (e.g. organisational changes, the introduction or changes of activities within or outside of the scope of the ESG), the agency should inform EQAR at its earliest convenience.

The following standards were judged as partially compliant by EQAR Register Committee (see EQAR Register Committee's decision not to include the agency on the Register, Ref. RC41/A133, 12 December 2023), and the following aspects are thus expected to be covered in the review:

- ESG 2.1 (Consideration of internal quality assurance) regarding whether the standards 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 and 1.8 of the ESG are covered within the portfolio of EQA activities of the agency;
- ESG 2.4 (Peer review experts) regarding whether the agency includes student-members in all procedures involving external experts;
- ESG 2.6 (Reporting) regarding whether AIC improved transparency in its reporting processes (i.e., publishing of full decisions together with the reports, including reflecting on the additional elements which have been provided and taken into consideration after the site visit and the additional tasks given to the higher education institution);
- ESG 3.6 (Internal quality assurance and professional conduct) regarding whether the agency has a consolidated internal quality assurance system, including internal and external feedback mechanisms for continuous improvement.

The report should also confirm whether the other findings (in regard of those standards not covered in depth now) of the full review report of 28 June 2023 remain valid.

Chapter 2.2: Content and preparation of the review report

The agency is expected to produce a self-assessment report on the points raised above, indicating changes that have taken place since the last full review. In particular, the agency shall elaborate on the legislative changes leading to the removal of any EQA activities from the agency's overall portfolio, following the full review in 2023. In addition, the agency will indicate any eventual changes and developments in the agency's activities since 2023 until today beyond those listed under the criteria under scrutiny, and that might be relevant in view of the agency's ESG compliance. This requirement follows ENQA's policy on partial reviews of members under review, Content, p. 2, and EQAR's Procedures for Applications².

The focused review foresees a site visit (in person) to the agency.

Following the site visit, a review report will be drafted in consultation with all review panel members and correspond to the purpose and scope of the review as defined above. In particular, the review report will concentrate on the same criteria as in a full review and assess how the compliance has evolved since this last review. Furthermore, it will provide a clear rationale for its findings concerning each ESG. When preparing the report, the review panel should bear in mind the EQAR Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG³ to ensure that the report will contain sufficient information for the Register Committee for application to EQAR. Finally, the report will also assess any eventual changes that have been brought to the attention of the panel in the self-assessment report.

² <https://www.eqar.eu/about/official-documents/#procedures-for-applications>

³ The Use and Interpretations of the ESG are available at the following link:

https://www.eqar.eu/assets/uploads/2020/09/RC_12_1_UseAndInterpretationOfTheESG_v3_0.pdf

Chapter 3: Panel composition

The ENQA Agency Review Committee will nominate three external reviewers to complete the task. The composition of the panel for the AIC's full review in 2023 was as follows:

Brian Norton	Chair (EUA nominee), academic
Pieter-Jan Van de Velde	Secretary (ENQA nominee), quality assurance professional
Ieva Vaiciukevičienė	Panel member (ENQA nominee), quality assurance professional
Michał Goszczyński	Panel member (ESU nominee, member of the European Students' Union Quality Assurance Student Experts Pool)

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

One of the panel members will be appointed as a Chair of the panel. The panel secretary will be appointed by the Chair, should the Chair not cover the secretary tasks.

The panel members will be asked whether they are willing and able to carry out the work within the timeline as listed in chapter 4 of the terms of reference.

Chapter 4: Timeline

	Deadline
Terms of Reference agreed with AIC and EQAR	June 2024
Appointment of focused review panel members and agreement on reviewer contracts	July 2024
Completion of focused review SAR by AIC	31 August 2024
Delivery of the final SAR to the panel	September 2024
Site visit to AIC	Early December 2024
Delivery of draft report to ENQA Secretariat	December 2024/January 2025
Draft report to AIC for a factual check	January 2025
Completion of report and submission to ENQA	January 2025
Report validation by ENQA Agency Review Committee	February 2025
EQAR Register Committee meeting and decision on the application	March 2025

Chapter 5: Costs

ITEM	COST
Expert fee - Chair	€ 2 000
Expert fee - panel member	€ 1 500
Expert fee - panel member	€ 1 500
Coordination fee ENQA	€ 2 500
Site visit (estimate, full actual cost to be covered by the	€ 2 500

agency) ⁴	
TOTAL	€ 10 000

Chapter 6: Annexes

Annex 1: EQAR Register Committee's decision not to include the agency on the Register, Ref. RC41/A133, 12 December 2023

⁴ Calculation is based on four return flights to Latvia (three experts and a review coordinator), and two nights in a hotel as proposed by the agency under review.