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Dublin, 28 September 2017

Subject: ACQUIN's appeal to ENQA and decision on ACQUIN's membership in ENQA

Dear Ms Moser,

I am writing to inform you of the outcome of the ENQA Board's discussion of 13 September 2017 regarding the appeal ACQUIN lodged against the ENQA Board's decision of 14 February 2017 to designate ACQUIN as a Member under review for a period of two years with the need to undergo a new (partial) review process before the end of this period.

On 24 May 2017, ACQUIN submitted an appeal to the ENQA Board against the Board's decision. In a letter of 26 June 2017 the President of ENQA informed the ENQA Appeals and Complaints Committee (hereafter: ACC) of the appeal, requesting the ACC to review the Board's decision. Enclosed in the President's letter to the ACC were:

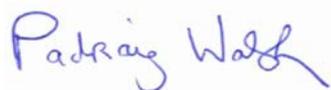
- ACQUIN's letter of appeal dated 24 May 2017
- The ENQA Board's decision letter to ACQUIN dated 14 February 2017
- Extract from the minutes of the ENQA Board meeting
- The expert panel's review report

The ACC gave their statement to the ENQA Board on 8 August 2017 in which the committee recommends the Board to reconfirm ACQUIN's membership in ENQA, i.e. overturn its decision to designate ACQUIN Member under review.

Following this, the Board took a decision at its meeting on 13 September 2017, in which it follows the statement of the ACC and reconfirms ACQUIN's membership in ENQA for five years from the initial decision taken on 14 February 2017. A follow-up report is expected in two years' from this date, i.e. by February 2019. Please find the summary of the ACC's findings as an appendix to this letter. This letter will be published on the ENQA website together with the final review report as well as the Board's initial decision.

For any questions, do not hesitate to be in touch with the ENQA Secretariat.

Yours sincerely,



Padraig Walsh
President of ENQA

Annex: Summary of findings

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The ACC concluded that the decision of the ENQA Board should be overturned in the context of evidence provided and evaluated against the appropriate criteria, standards and guidelines (ESG):

ESG 3.4 Thematic analysis

Evaluation report (p 41)

The panel mention three regular activities that they find to be positive contributions to compliance with this standard:

- Workshops that accompany General Assemblies, reported to institutions and committee members;
- Annual quality reports (2012, 2013, 2014 available);
- Reports from various international projects and workshops.

The panel found that the agency does to some extent analyse the findings of its evaluation and accreditation activities. These activities and results are documented, but mainly for a narrow group of stakeholders. They are not published for the general public in a transparent way. On this background, the panel found ACQUIN's performance to be only partially compliant. The panel's overall assessment of the agency was one of 'substantially compliant with the ESG'.

The Board's statement (from the minutes of the relevant Board meeting)

"The Board discussed that no effort was made as regards thematic analysis thus this standard was considered non-compliant (instead of partially compliant as judged by the panel). It was agreed that the agency would be granted status Member under review."

ACQUIN's letter of appeal

ACQUIN reiterates the information given in the review panel's report by referring to the Agency's participation in international projects, notably the research project Quality assurance of studying and teaching via processes of accreditation and evaluation, run by the International Centre for Higher Education Research Kassel. No concrete reference is made to ACQUIN's contribution to analyses or reports.

The Agency further states its intention concerning future practice of fully complying with the ESG standard, but admits that this has been disturbed/deferred by the ongoing restructuring of the entire accreditation system in Germany, arguing that it would be unpractical to design a new practice before the outcome of the German reform is clear.

ACC's assessment

One reason for judging in favour of the panel recommendation is the fact that a panel always has access to more information through the interviews at the site visit as well as to documents. The panel supplies – in this specific case – with the only substantial evidence AAC has concerning the Agency's practice. This evidence shows that ACQUIN actually does carry out some thematic analyses of its findings, and that these are distributed and discussed among relevant stakeholders. The AAC agrees that their practice leaves very much to be asked for, and that there is a failure to disseminate results in a transparent way. However, the evidence AAC has is clearly at variance with the Board's statement of "no effort made".

On the other hand, ACQUIN's appeal letter does nothing to show that ACQUIN actually performs better on this standard than what is described in the panel's report. It may even be considered to have the opposite effect when AQUIN justifies the lack of initiative with reference to the changing situation in the German accreditation system.

Overall, the AAC finds it difficult to judge in favour of the Board's decision (versus that of the panel). A concern for consistency in AAC's judgement on this particular standard also weighs in favour of supporting the appeal, although the appeal letter itself is too weak to have any impact on this decision. AAC also takes into consideration that the 'new' 3.4 – and the Board's expectations concerning compliance – brings in an interpretation that many agencies may not yet have taken fully on board.

The ACC is however of the opinion that a judgement of 'partial compliance' on standard 3.4 would be the correct one, securing ACQUIN's continued full membership, while sending a clear message that much more is expected during the coming years.