

Mr. Paul Thijssen
Director
Netherlands Quality Agency (NQA)
Catharijnesingel 56
3511 GE Utrecht
The Netherlands

Bern, 12 July 2018

Subject: Membership of NQA in ENQA

Dear Mr. Thijssen,

I am pleased to inform you that, at its meeting of 21 June 2018, the Board of ENQA took the decision that NQA meets the necessary requirements for being granted ENQA Membership for five years from the date of the decision. The Board concluded that NQA is in substantial compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) based on the review report and report scrutiny.

The Board acknowledges that NQA is working in a specific national setup with different actors in the system, and where certain elements of the ESG are not directly the responsibility of NQA. Nevertheless, NQA has certain challenges that are not directly linked with the specificities of the system and thus, it is encouraged to look for ways to tackle them and keep developing its activities, following the recommendations of the review panel.

In particular, the Board would like to encourage NQA to proactively engage in producing and publishing its own thematic analysis that would describe and analyse the general findings of NQA's external quality assurance activities. The Board acknowledges that this standard may be challenging especially for private agencies. It is important, however, for any agency to evaluate the consistency of their reports and reflect on any common themes arising from them. Such reflection would not only feed back to the stakeholders and society but it would further strengthen the internal quality assurance of the agency.

Given also the growing degree of internationalisation of Dutch higher education, NQA is encouraged to stress the importance of including at least some international experts in the panels to institutions that are being reviewed, as recommended by the review panel.

NQA is also encouraged to put specific focus on the panel's recommendations under standard ESG 2.7 Complaints and appeals. As NQA does not take a formal decision on accreditation, the issue of an appeal is not relevant. However, the institutions contract NQA to conduct an assessment and there should be a formal opportunity for them to raise their concerns about the conduct should they be dissatisfied. The complaints process thus should be formalised incorporating some independent, external input by appointing an external commission, for instance.

The Board expects a follow-up report to be based on the recommendations found in the panel report (as outlined in the attached annex) within two years of its decision, i.e. by June 2020.

In addition, the Board encourages NQA to take advantage of the voluntary progress visit – a new enhancement-led feature in the review process. The visit would take place 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](#).

Please accept my congratulations to NQA for the positive review outcome and I look forward to fruitful future cooperation.

Yours sincerely,



Christoph Grolimund
President

Annex: Areas for development

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As outlined by the review panel, NQA 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

NQA is recommended to establish an advisory committee with the participation of different relevant stakeholders.

NQA is recommended to formalise its strategic plan to reflect on its objectives.

ESG 3.3 Independence

NQA is recommended to establishing stricter internal procedures in order to further organise consulting and assessments.

It is recommended that NQA stresses the importance of including some international experts in the panels to institutions being reviewed.

ESG 3.4 Thematic analysis

NQA is recommended to include thematic analysis as one regular activity in its planning.

NQA is recommended to use a part of the budget and the experience and knowledge of internal and external secretaries gained from various assessment procedures in order to conduct those thematic analyses.

ESG 3.5 Resources

NQA is recommended to look at measures to keep valuable staff members engaged in the organisation during the periods with a low workload.

NQA is recommended to increase the interaction between its internal and external secretaries.

ESG 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

NQA is recommended to reflect about ways to intensify the communication with the authorities and other relevant stakeholders in order to collect greater feedback about procedures and their effectiveness and relevance.

ESG 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance

It is recommended that NQA could demonstrate in its procedures and guidelines more the ties between the standards of Part 1 of the ESG and the standards in the programme assessment frameworks, in order to strengthen the awareness of panels and institutes.

NQA is recommended to evaluate in how far the ESG standard 2.1 is effectively addressed during the programme assessments and communicate its findings to the relevant stakeholders.

ESG 2.4 Peer-review experts

NQA is recommended to strengthen the training of panel members in different ways, such as training sessions for new members and update sessions for experienced members.

ESG 2.5 Criteria for outcomes

NQA is recommended to strengthen the training of panel members about the application of the criteria and using that experience to build a more robust view about them and further improve consistency.

ESG 2.6 Reporting

NQA is recommended to publish the reports on its own website or to include the link [to the NVAO database], as NQA already enunciates in its SAR.

ESG 2.7 Complaints and appeals

NQA is recommended to develop a complaints procedure and communicate it to the institutions. That should include the establishment of an independent and competent commission that may handle any relevant issues.