

Slovenian Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
Franci Demšar
Director
Slovenska cesta 9
1000 Ljubljana
Slovenia

Bern, 21 December 2018

Subject: Reconfirmation of membership of SQAA in ENQA

Dear Dr. Demšar,

I am pleased to inform you that, at its meeting of 13 December 2018, the Board of ENQA agreed to reconfirm the SQAA membership of ENQA for five years from that date. The Board concluded that SQAA is in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015) and thus fulfils the membership criteria according to article 6, paragraph 1 of ENQA's rules of procedure.

At the same time, the Board marks down several critical points concerning the review. Firstly, in relation to standard 3.6 on internal quality assurance and professional conduct, the review (foremost its self-evaluation process) identified reasonable doubt on how the agency manages its internal quality assurance and how it involves its internal and external stakeholders in the evaluation and quality improvement activities. In this regard, the relation of the agency with its council as the highest decision-making body has come to the attention of the Board as a serious concern. The relation needs to be improved to play a more active role in leading towards the enhancement of the agency's internal quality assurance activities.

Furthermore, the Board urges the agency to give more attention to ESG standard 3.4 Thematic analysis. The Board expects SQAA to follow the recommendations of the review panel and provide sufficient thematic analyses on issues relevant to the agency's stakeholders. In addition, of utmost importance is the appropriate dissemination of the outcomes of thematic analyses to SQAA's stakeholders.

The Board also seconds the critical remarks of the panel on standard 2.6 Reporting, where the panel recommends SQAA to publish all reports, including those with a negative outcome (in the case of initial accreditation procedures). Furthermore, providing adequate information about the outcomes of external assessments and on the agency's activities in general is of significant importance. Priority should be given to maintaining the agency's website up to date at all times.

The Board calls upon the agency to seriously consider the recommendations in the panel's report and take immediate action to address them. Due to the several critical points made in this letter, the Board expects a follow-up report to be received within one year of its decision, i.e. by December 2019.

The Board also encourages SQAA 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. 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 SQAA.

Yours sincerely,



Christoph Grolimund
President

Annex: Areas for development

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As outlined by the review panel, SQAA 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

SQAA is recommended to explore ways to ensure the full commitment of all stakeholders to the external quality assurance process.

ESG 3.3 Official status

SQAA is recommended paying due attention to maintaining the agency's independence and making good use of the available instruments.

ESG 3.4 Thematic analysis

SQAA is recommended to develop a method for the production and dissemination of thematic analyses on issues relevant to its stakeholders.

ESG 3.5 Resources

SQAA is recommended to ensure the necessary funding for the implementation of its strategy plan and subsequent action plans, including a staff development plan.

ESG 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

SQAA is recommended to include external stakeholders more directly in the internal evaluation and quality improvement activities of the agency. Also proper feedback should be provided to better inform stakeholders about the results of surveys/actions taken by the agency. In addition, SQAA is recommended to involve all its bodies in the conception and the implementation of its internal quality assurance policy. The agency's council as the highest decision-making body could lead the way and play a more active role.

ESG 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose

SQAA is recommended to apply the adopted methodology with a maximum of flexibility ensuring its fitness for purpose for all Slovenian institutions regardless of size and profile. If need be, the methodology should be revised in order to make it more effective. In addition, SQAA is recommended to focus on quality enhancement rather than quality control, and to foster further development of a quality culture within Slovenian higher education.

ESG 2.3 Implementing processes

SQAA is recommended to determine the nature of the follow-up in its quality assurance processes, and not only in external assessments with a negative outcome. Furthermore, SQAA is recommended to develop a shared understanding of criteria and publish the official interpretation of the criteria and regulations.

ESG 2.4 Peer-review experts

SQAA is recommended reconsidering the expert pool especially given the introduction of institutional reviews. The expert pool should be sufficiently diverse and include students of all types of Slovenian institutions. Special efforts and extra resources are needed to engage (more) international peers.

ESG 2.5 Criteria for outcomes

SQAA is recommended to encourage institutions to include consistent follow-up procedures in their internal quality assurance system. In addition, SQAA is recommended to formalise the decision-taking process taking into account the different roles and tasks of the expert panel (external assessment report), the agency's director and staff (proposal for decision), and the agency council (formal decision).

ESG 2.6 Reporting

SQAA is recommended to publish all reports including those with a negative outcome in the case of initial accreditation procedures for reasons of transparency and further development.

ESG 2.7 Complaints and appeals

SQAA is recommended to specify its complaints procedure as part of its quality assurance system and communicate this procedure more transparently to the institutions.