

Standard agreement for research and report assignments

Appendix 2 The Commissioned Party's specification of the Assignment

In the following we refer to the Terms of Reference for the assignment.

External review of ENQAs agency review process

Terms of reference

January 2019

1 Background and context

ENQA is a membership organization that composes of QA organisations in the European Higher Education Area.

Historically, initial ideas of formalized cooperation in the area of quality assurance can be traced back to pilot projects in the early/mid-1990s. ENQA was established in March 2000, following up both on EU Council recommendation concerning quality assurance from 1998 and the establishment of the Bologna Process in 1999. Emphasis on quality assurance was one of the initial action lines in the Bologna Process and during the ministerial conference in Berlin, a call for the development of “mutually shared criteria and methodologies on quality assurance” was included in the communique (Berlin Communiqué, 2003). E4 with ENQA in the lead was given the task to develop the “standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance”. A result of this work was the *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG), formally adopted in 2005 in Bergen. Following the establishment of ESG, the E4 were also founding members for EQAR, a public registry of agencies that comply with the ESG. In 2012, E4 in cooperation with Education International (EI), BUSINESSEUROPE and the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) were called to propose a revised version of ESG. After several rounds of consultations and recommendations, the new ESG were adopted in 2015.

In terms of its organization, ENQA was first established as a network. In November 2004, the ENQA was transformed from a network to the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, while retaining its original abbreviation ENQA. This marked that only quality assurance agencies could be members of ENQA, and not ministries. ENQA now consists of three main entities – the General Assembly (GA), the Board and the Secretariat. The General Assembly is the main decision-making body and it includes representatives of ENQA member agencies, whereas representatives from ministries and stakeholder organisations can function as observers. The Board is the executive body of ENQA. It has 9 members, of which one of the members functions as the President, with two vice-presidents and a treasurer. The Secretariat is responsible for the operation of the association, in terms of policy, administration, keeping a record and account management. The Secretariat is led by a Director. In addition to this, ENQA also has an Appeals and Complaints

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Committee that composes of four ENQA members that are nominated by the Board and appointed by the GA.

ENQA states its mission as to: *drive the development of quality assurance by representing agencies internationally, supporting them nationally, and providing them with comprehensive services and networking opportunities. ENQA promotes the enhancement of quality and the development of a quality culture in higher education. ENQA works to contribute to a European Higher Education Area in which students have access to high quality education and can achieve qualifications that are respected world-wide. ENQA is open to the diversity of higher education systems and quality assurance approaches and adheres to the following values:*

- *Transparency: ENQA publishes its policies, procedures and criteria for decisions and reports.*
- *Independence: ENQA actively promotes the operational independence of quality assurance agencies and supports the autonomy of higher education institutions.*
- *Collaboration: ENQA works in a consultative manner with its members and affiliates, European partners and fellow associations.*
- *Integrity: ENQA operates with integrity and in a fair, equitable, impartial, objective and professional manner.*

An important task for ENQA are the agency review processes. It is through these review processes that member agencies can demonstrate their compliance with the ESG. The results of the review determine membership in both ENQA and EQAR, and are also perceived as a mark of quality and trustworthiness of the QA agency and approach.

In 2010, an analysis was carried out about the use of ESG in ENQA agency review processes (Stensaker, Harvey, Huisman, Langfeldt, & Westerheijden, 2010). The analysis found that in the first years of agency review reports, the structure and review process had become more similar over time. Yet, the evaluation also found that there were a range of cases where similar labels were used for different practices – e.g. how evidence was used in the reviews, how staff competence was assessed or how the different criteria from the ESG were assessed. As a result, the analysis concluded that “*it is debatable whether the external review process is as transparent as it appears in theory*” (Stensaker et al., 2010, p. 585). Elsewhere, concerns were raised regarding the European level coordination processes of quality assurance, that too much focus had been put on assuring legitimacy on national level, at the expense of effects on teaching and learning; and that focus on compliance was too strong, making the system too rigid (Huisman & Westerheijden, 2010). ENQA procedures for the agency review process were revised in 2011, when ENQA took over the coordinating function, to assure greater transparency and coherence across the different evaluations. In 2018, ENQA called for a new evaluation of the agency review processes.

2 Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

The evaluation addresses two questions:

- Q1. Assess how the principles outlined in the standards of ESG Parts 2 and 3 for QA agencies are reflected in the reviews of agencies (while adapting them to the context and work of ENQA); and
- Q2. How ENQA procedures contribute to the improvement of the quality of work in QA agencies and allow for innovative approaches to QA processes.

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2.1 Activities within the scope of this evaluation

The evaluation will only assess how the agency review process is carried out and does not extend to other activities carried out by ENQA.

3 The Review Process

Overall, the review process is designed to follow in broad terms ENQAs own agency review processes, with some additions. In sum, the review process consists of the following elements:

- Establishing the terms of reference
- Nomination and appointment of the expert panel
- Documentation:
 - o A self-assessment report (SAR) by ENQA, following a prescribed template that takes a starting point in ESG
 - o A “user survey” to assess the role of ENQA in the development of the agencies
 - o Additional documentation (including also input from EQAR)
- Site visit to ENQA. Includes interviews with different groups of actors in the process¹.
- Preparation and completion of final report by the review panel with assistance from the technical panel secretary
- ENQA will have an opportunity to correct factual errors in the draft report
- Publication of the report.

3.1 Nomination and appointment of the review panel members

The review panel will consist of minimum five members of whom one will function as the panel chair. The panel will include: one external quality assurance expert; one student, one academic, two experts with a broad understanding of the European Higher Education policy context. Of specific concern is to maintain a balance of those with practical experience in the field of quality assurance and preferably also agency review process (e.g. former leaders of QA agencies, Board members, or similar), and those who have research expertise regarding the theme. The panel composition also needs to take into account appropriate gender and geographical balance, preferably also including non-European reviewers. Representatives of E4 organisations cannot act as review panel members but can be consulted for suggestions of relevant members.

Suggested experts will be reviewed to avoid conflicts of interests and the experts will have to sign a non-conflict of interest statement regarding the review of ENQA agency review process.

The review manager appointed by NIFU will act as a technical panel secretary. The role of a technical panel secretary is to assist the review panel with their work, facilitate the site visit and preparation

¹ Here, we refer to the note in the call which stipulates that travel costs to participate in interviews will be covered by ENQA – page 2.

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of documents, and assist the review panel with writing up the review report. The technical panel secretary does not participate in the evaluation.

When the panel is composed, the panel secretary will go through the evaluation process with them during a preparatory Skype meeting.

3.2 Self-assessment by ENQA

ENQA is responsible to develop its own self-assessment report (SAR). The following criteria is expected to be underpinning the process: it should be a process with a clearly defined schedule where relevant stakeholders and actors are involved; the self-assessment should follow a structured template (main points outlined below); the report should be concise and comprehensive; the report should be submitted to the review manager in a timely manner.

A template for the SAR will be distributed to ENQA in January. Key elements in the template include the following:

- *Development of the SAR.* Describe the process of developing the SAR, include also information who within ENQA was involved with writing, whether, how and what kind of external input was sought, and so forth.
- *Brief description of the history and profile of ENQA*, including major shifts in activities and procedures, and the role of agency review process in ENQAs overall activities. Includes also a description of the staff at ENQA and their competence.
- *Selection and training of experts* – an overview of the pool of experts and how often they are used in the reviews, how they are trained, and how their training is maintained and updated.
- *Detailed description of ENQAs management of the agency review process.* A detailed process description should be provided concerning the review process. In particular, the SAR should include reflections on the relevance and challenges with current practices. Each of the identified standards in the template should be described and document.
- *Stakeholder involvement* – how does ENQA involve stakeholders, including both E4 and the QA agencies. Given that the “users” of ENQA are the QA agencies, this should also include a description of how ENQA collects feedback from the agencies and how such feedback is used for further development of ENQAs work.
- Provide information about the *outcomes of the review processes*. This includes quantitative information about:
 - The number of reviews conducted, per year (first review, subsequent review)
 - The number of successful applications and the number of applications with negative results from the review process, and the number of reviews where ENQA board has asked for additional information

In addition, qualitative description of the decision-making process should be provided and reflected upon.

- *SWOT analysis* concerning the agency review process from ENQA.
- *Key challenges and areas for future development* regarding the agency review process.

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3.3 User survey

This user survey will follow a structured template prepared by the team at the coordinating body. To obtain specific information about the agency review process, the user survey will focus both on a more general overview of the agency review process and whether the use of ESG was clear for the agency, and also how it contributed to how the agencies work with quality (with examples). The questions will be both quantitative and qualitative in nature and are expected to provide information about issues such as the clarity of review guidelines, decision-making process and ENQAs management procedures. Given that the agency review processes are already time consuming it is also important to keep this survey reasonably brief to avoid substantial workload for the agencies. Results from this user survey will be summarized for the review panel by the technical panel secretary.

3.4 Other documentation

In addition to the user survey, the panel can also consider other additional data. This includes annual reports of ENQA, synthesis of existing research and evaluation studies, and various public information (e.g. mission statements of ENQA, etc). Feedback from EQAR will also be sought. The technical panel secretary will systematize this information for the panel if the panel requests this.

3.5 Site visit

The draft proposal of a schedule will be submitted to the review panel at least four weeks before site visit. Prior to the site visit, the panel will have a Skype meeting, including also the panel secretary. During this meeting, expectations for the site visit, as well as any initial impressions from the SAR will be clarified. In addition, questions regarding additional documentation by ENQA will be clarified. The meeting will also serve as a basis to assure that there is a shared understanding of the purposes and aims of the review process.

The site visit will include both internal meetings, but also interviews with various respondents who concern the agency review process. The expected duration for the site visit is 1,5-2 days. Relevant respondents to interview during site visit are:

- Staff of ENQA (reviews managers) who has experience with being a coordinator of an agency review
- Leadership at ENQA (director, deputy director) on how they manage the process internally
- ENQA board members regarding the decision-making procedure and members of the four ENQA review (sub-)committees
- Relevant stakeholders, including E4, EQAR
- Examples of users – that is, QA agencies who have been through an agency review process recently (1 group interview, can be conducted on Skype)

The technical panel secretary of the expert panel will make notes of all of the interviews that will also be used for finalizing the report.

3.6 Preparation and publication of final report

Based on the self-assessment, additional documentation (including user survey) and information obtained during the site visit, the panel will complete its report draft. This includes also an

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assessment against all of the selected adjusted evaluation criterion (based on ESG). While the panel secretary contributes to the writing of the text (e.g. descriptive sections and making notes during panel discussions), it is the panel experts who are responsible for any reasoning and evaluative statements in the report. The final report should be no longer than 30-40 pages.

When draft is completed, ENQA will have an opportunity to correct any factual errors in the report.

The final version of the report will be publicly available, to make the process transparent and assure legitimacy of the process.

4 Budget

The approximate share of the costs in the evaluation include

Project budget	Share
Coordinator fee, including the running of the secretariat, and briefing and training of experts	Approx 60%
Fees of reviewers and travel costs	Approx 40%
TOTAL	€ 30 000 excl VAT

5 Timeline

The timeline stipulated by ENQA is marked with red in the following table. We have identified the following stages of the process:

Date	Activity
Beginning of January 2019	Skype meeting between ENQA and the coordinator to establish terms of reference and clarify any questions
January 2019	Draft materials prepared for the evaluation process, internal QA processes at NIFU Revision of SAR template and specifications Distribute SAR template to ENQA
February 2019	Develop user survey
March 15 th	Distribute user survey to the QA agencies who have participated in the agency review process
At latest: April 2019	Selection of panel of experts
End of April 2019	Deadline for the user survey
May 2019	Summarise results from user survey
At latest: End of May 2019	ENQA External Review Steering Committee approves composition of expert panel
Beginning of June 2019	First meeting with the expert panel and secretary, training session and clarifications
Mid-June 2019	Self-Assessment Report from ENQA
August 2019	Expert panel Skype meeting – discussing impressions from SAR
September 2019	Site visit by external review panel

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October-November 2019	Preparation of the external review panel report
November 2019	Fact check of the report draft by ENQA
December 2019	Completion of the report by the external review panel – report needs to be completed by the ENQA External Review Steering Committee

References

- Berlin Communiqué. (2003). Realising the European Higher Education Area: Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education in Berlin on 19 September 2003.
- Huisman, J., & Westerheijden, D. F. (2010). Bologna and Quality Assurance: Progress Made or Pulling the Wrong Cart? *Quality in Higher Education*, 16(1), 63-66.
- Stensaker, B., Harvey, L., Huisman, J., Langfeldt, L., & Westerheijden, D. F. (2010). The Impact of the European Standards and Guidelines in Agency Evaluations. *European journal of education*, 45(4), 577-587. doi:10.1111/j.1465-3435.2010.01450.x