



European Association for
Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Prof. Dr. Muzaffer Elmas
President
Turkish Higher Education Quality Council (THEQC)
Yukseögretim Kalite Kurulu, 06800 Ankara
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Bern, 4 May 2020

Subject: Membership of THEQC in ENQA

Dear Prof. Dr. Muzaffer Elmas,

I am pleased to inform you that, at its meeting of 28 April 2020, the Board of ENQA took the decision to grant the THEQC membership of ENQA for five years from that date. The Board concluded that THEQC 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.

The Board would like to use this opportunity to provide an articulation regarding standard 3.4 Thematic analysis, where their judgement differs from that of the panel. Contrary to the conclusion of the panel, the Board notes that the Annual Situation Reports cannot be fully considered as thematic analysis of THEQC as they do not describe and analyse the general findings of the agency's external quality assurance activities. Following this, in the opinion of the Board, the standard can be considered only as substantially compliant with the ESG.

In regard to ESG 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct, the Board shares the panel's concern that internal quality assurance of THEQC is not taking place in a systematic way, as there are no procedures set and responsibilities are not assigned among the agency staff. In the opinion of the Board, the standard can thus be considered only as partially compliant with the ESG.

Regardless of the overall positive decision to grant membership, the Board urges the agency to give more attention to the standards where only partial compliance with the ESG is reached. In particular, the Board seconds the critical remarks of the panel on ESG 3.3 Independence, 3.5 Resources and 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct and asks the agency to elaborate in detail on the progress made in the follow-up report. Only a significant progress on all standards where partial compliance with the ESG is reached will enable the agency to renew its membership in ENQA in the next period.



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The Board would like to receive a comprehensive follow-up report within two years of its decision, i.e. by April 2022 where THEQC is expected to address the panel's recommendations.

The Board also encourages THEQC to take advantage of the voluntary progress visit – an 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 confirmation of membership of THEQC. We look forward to enhancing our collaboration within ENQA family in your new role as a member.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Grolimund', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Christoph Grolimund
President

Annex: Areas for development

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As outlined by the review panel, THEQC 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

In the development of future strategic documents, the agency should make the participation of students more visible. It should ensure that the student member of the Council is involved in the agency's work to the same extent as other members.

THEQC is recommended to include further information in the Strategic Plan, such as: plan of publications (including thematic analyses) and the staff development plan.

THEQC should publish the composition and tasks of the Advisory Board on its website.

ESG 3.3 Independence

THEQC is recommended to reconsider its structure in terms of the value of an overarching and representative governing body and an executive arm which manages the agency's operations and processes.

In order to improve the operational independence, the agency must continue to improve the balance between permanent staff who are on the payroll of the agency and those who work as consultants/advisors/experts. The current operational independence of the agency is not assured due to the presence of third parties in the daily job of the agency.

ESG 3.4 Thematic analysis

The development of further thematic publications should be part of the strategic planning or annual monitoring process in order to ensure that the production of such publications each year is costed in terms of staff workload and that there is a strategic approach to the selection of topics.

ESG 3.5 Resources

THEQC is recommended to continue to improve the balance between permanent staff who are on the payroll of the agency and those who work as consultants/advisors/experts. It is crucial for an agency to build its own capacity and expertise based on its own staff. A clear allocation of tasks and responsibilities in the permanent staff (functional profiles could be useful) and the establishment of an overall staff development plan, including annual training programs, are seen by the panel as useful measures in this field.

THEQC should strengthen the capacity of the core of professional permanent staff.

In order to safeguard the future sustainability of the agency, the THEQC's budget should be planned and designed as part of the strategic planning process, taking into account previous year's expenditure and upcoming years planned activities. Annual monitoring of the strategic plan is important in this regard.

ESG 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

THEQC should develop a clear definition of responsibilities for internal quality assurance issues within the agency, in order to improve its organization and effectiveness.

THEQC should further use the data they have to really develop the agency's internal quality systems rather than just comply with external feedback from different stakeholders.

THEQC is recommended a full implementation of the Internal Quality Assurance System, with the definition of indicators in all the agency's processes.

ESG 2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance

THEQC is recommended to provide more focus on the provision of feedback on the ISERs which are elaborated by HEIs, in order to increase the impact of these reports on the quality improvement of institutions and to further develop their capacity to align with the standards in part one of the ESG.

ESG 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose

THEQC is recommended to carry out an internal review of the current evaluation process, as it is very new and will move to one of institutional accreditation; particular focus should be on follow-up and on how stakeholders – in the widest sense and not only those represented in the Council - are involved in the design of methodologies, not just in the review of criteria and processes.

ESG 2.3 Implementing processes

THEQC is recommended to recruit experts from outside Turkey, in particular for its external evaluation panels, as well as continuing with current plans for including representatives from the business sector in the evaluation panels.

THEQC is recommended to further develop clearly defined follow-up activities after Institutional external evaluation.

THEQC should reconsider the organization of site visits to avoid the implications of conflicts of interest raised by HEIs providing travel, accommodation and meals for the evaluation team; this has the potential to affect the independence and integrity of the process and may become even more relevant with the implementation of institutional accreditation in the near future.

ESG 2.4 Peer-review experts

THEQC is recommended to reconsider the voluntary nature of the work of evaluators (and others) who work for THEQC and that it considers the implications of such a situation in relation to the agency's operational independence.

ESG 2.5 Criteria for outcomes

THEQC is recommended to put in place mechanisms for ensuring the consistency of judgements within external review panels.

ESG 2.6 Reporting

THEQC is recommended that maturity level grades form part of the published reports.

THEQC should develop mechanisms to ensure consistency not only of the structure of the reports but also of the in-depth analysis they provide.

ESG 2.7 Complaints and appeals

THEQC is recommended to clarify the definitions of the terms 'complaints and appeals', ensuring that there is no confusion with and a separation from other mechanisms designed for the purposes of feedback.

The agency is recommended to ensure that its website clearly differentiates between pages that allow users to submit feedback and those that include information of separate processes for making a complaint or an appeal.

The agency should supplement what is currently in the legal article to document and publish clear processes for complaints and appeals on its website.

The agency should ensure that any new mechanism for dealing with complaints and appeals allows for a degree of independence from the Council in order to avoid any conflict of interest.