

ENQA AGENCY REVIEW

# HOLY SEE'S AGENCY FOR THE EVALUATION AND PROMOTION OF QUALITY IN ECCLESIASTICAL UNIVERSITIES AND FACILITIES (AVEPRO)

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report results from an external review assessing the compliance of Holy See's Agency for the Evaluation and Promotion of Quality in Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties (Agenzia della Santa Sede per la Valutazione e la Promozione della Qualità delle Università e Facoltà Ecclesiastiche (AVEPRO)) against the 2015 Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). As it is already the second review of AVEPRO, the review approach also reflects the developmental dimension and considers the legal changes relevant to quality assurance of the Holy See's higher education system, particularly *Veritatis Gaudium*. AVEPRO is a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) since 2014.

AVEPRO is in charge of evaluation of all ecclesiastical higher education institutions belonging to the Holy See. Due to its unique nature this implies a global scale of AVEPRO's activities. This external review report is based on the review process that primarily used AVEPRO's self-assessment report, a site visit of the ENQA appointed review panel to the Vatican, and published information available on AVEPRO's website.

AVEPRO's mission is twofold, as it includes the evaluation of ecclesiastical institutions, but also the promotion of quality in the higher education system of the Holy See. AVEPRO is not assigned with the task to accredit institutions, as this remains the responsibility of the Congregation for Catholic Education (CCE). While AVEPRO is funded from the budget of the Holy See, the operational use of the funds remains within its self governing responsibility. AVEPRO does not charge any fees to institutions.

Based not only on the written documentation and numerous evidences reviewed by the panel of experts, but considering the stakeholder interviews and impressions while talking to AVEPRO staff, it became obvious that AVEPRO is a well-respected institution in the HE system of the Holy See which enjoys trust by institutions and stakeholders. In the past years, AVEPRO has continued to intensify its activities in the promotion of quality in order to build trust on the side of the institutions. Benefiting from the unique culture of the higher education system of the Holy See, AVEPRO may make use of volunteer work to a much larger extent than comparable structures elsewhere. By doing so, the agency manages to increase the efficiency in the use of available resources. At the same time, it became obvious that in the future further resources will be required for the agency to fully achieve its mission.

The panel wishes to underline that the fair assessment of the agency according to the clear and focused requirements of the ESG occurred within the unique situation and complexity of the Holy See's higher education system, of which AVEPRO is an institutional body.

The panel found AVEPRO's level of alignment with the ESG to be the following:

Fully compliant with the following ESGs – 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.7, 2.1, and 2.2

Substantially compliant with the following ESGs – 3.6, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, and 2.7

Partially compliant: 3.5 and 2.6

The panel believes that AVEPRO has succeeded very well over the past years to establish and develop its role as a trusted partner in supporting the quality enhancement of the ecclesiastical higher education institutions. The panel hopes that its analyses and recommendations will support AVEPRO in continuing to do so.

# INTRODUCTION

This report analyses the compliance of the Holy See's Agency for the Evaluation and Promotion of Quality in Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties (Agenzia della Santa Sede per la Valutazione e la Promozione della Qualità delle Università e Facoltà Ecclesiastiche (AVEPRO)) with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG). It is based on an external review conducted in May 2019-March 2020.

## BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW AND OUTLINE OF THE REVIEW PROCESS

### BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

ENQA's regulations require all member agencies to undergo an external cyclical review, at least once every five years, in order to verify that they act in substantial compliance with the ESG as adopted at the Yerevan ministerial conference of the Bologna Process in 2015.

As this is AVEPRO's second review, the panel is expected to provide clear evidence of results in all areas and to acknowledge progress from the previous review. The panel has adopted a developmental approach, as the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* aim for constant enhancement of the agencies.

### MAIN FINDINGS OF THE 2014 REVIEW

In its 2014 report, the panel concluded that the Holy See's Agency for the Evaluation and Promotion of Quality in Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties is in substantial compliance with the ENQA Membership provisions. The panel therefore recommended to the Board of ENQA that AVEPRO should become a member of ENQA for a period of five years.

The 2014 report recognised AVEPRO as an agency breathing the air of confidence and openness with which the Agency viewed the future in a context that was subject to change and development. The detailed findings of the review, that was back then based on ENQA membership criteria were as follows:

**ESG 2.1 (Use of internal quality assurance procedures): substantial compliance**

- AVEPRO should revisit its review methodology to more fully encompass expectations for internal quality assurance arrangements within higher education institutions as laid down in ESG part I.

**ESG 2.2 (Development of external quality assurance processes): full compliance**

**ESG 2.3 (Criteria for decisions): full compliance**

**ESG 2.4 (Processes fit for purpose): substantial compliance**

- The Panel welcomes the involvement of student members within the teams but encourages AVEPRO for greater effort to bring cohesion to the involvement of students in the processes of the Agency and in quality assurance matters on the ground within the Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties.

**ESG 2.5 (Reporting): substantial compliance**

- AVEPRO should reinforce requirements towards different review panels so that they fully follow the Agency's guidance in all aspects of external reviews, in particular adhering to the single standard report form developed. The Agency may also be willing to learn from ENQA EQArep project on best practice in publishing reports and to adjust its performance accordingly.

**ESG 2.6 (Follow-up procedures): substantial compliance**

**ESG 2.7 (Periodic reviews): substantial compliance**

- The team is hopeful that necessary preparations for the articulation of AVEPRO work and facilitation is under way to assure proper running of the external reviews for all higher education institutions that belong to the system of the Holy See. Respecting international commitments in the Bologna process, all types of higher education institutions, in their own right are expected to take due consideration and action to implement provisions of ESG part I.

**ESG 2.8 (System-wide analyses): full compliance**

**ESG 3.1 (Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education): full compliance**

**ESG 3.2 (Official status): full compliance**

- Given the global presence of Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties, and the possibility of articulation into the regional subcomponents, the Agency is encouraged to discuss, together with relevant administrative bodies of the Holy See, the necessary prerequisites for the greater international visibility and active involvement in ENQA.

**ESG 3.3 (Activities): full compliance**

- The Agency together with relevant units within the Holy See's administrative structures are encouraged to further take actions to secure appropriate staff and other resources enabling to fulfil AVEPRO duties on a five-yearly basis. AVEPRO could also engage in joint activities and benefit from mutual learning with other agencies members of ENQA.

**ESG 3.4 (Resources): substantial compliance**

- We conclude that the development of the review processes and procedures to meet the needs of the medium and long-term future will require additional financial resources and significantly increased staffing resources. We recommend that this matter receives the urgent concern of the appropriate offices in the Holy See.

**ESG 3.5 (Mission statement): full compliance**

**ESG 3.6 (Independence): full compliance**

**ESG 3.7 (External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies): full compliance**

**ESG 3.8 (Accountability procedures): substantial compliance**

- When talking to esteemed members of the Board of Directors and the Scientific Council, the Panel saw their dedication to serve the Agency and also willingness to contribute to reconsideration of the current arrangements of these two advisory bodies to more energetically support the Agency's work, at the same time permitting some saving of resources.

**ENQA criterion 8 (Consistency of judgements, appeals system and contribution to ENQA aims): full compliance**

## REVIEW PROCESS

The 2019 external review of AVEPRO was conducted in line with the process described in the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and in accordance with the timeline set out in the Terms of Reference. The panel for the external review of AVEPRO was appointed by ENQA and composed of the following members:

- Oliver Vettori (Chair), Director Programme Management & Teaching-/Learning Support, WU Vienna (Vienna University of Economics and Business), Austria (ENQA nominee);
- Ronny Heintze (Secretary), Commissioner for International Affairs, Agency for Quality Assurance through Accreditation of Study Programmes (AQAS), Germany (ENQA nominee);
- Hannele Niemi, UNESCO Chair on Educational Ecosystems for Equity and Quality of Learning, Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Helsinki (EUA nominee);
- Matthew Kitching, PhD Student in Higher Education at Lancaster University, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Bucks Students' Union, United Kingdom (ESU nominee).

Maria Kelo coordinated the review on behalf of the ENQA Secretariat. The panel is thankful to the support delivered by Maria Kelo, allowing the panel to process the review in a well-structured way.

The review followed the generally practiced sequence which includes the agency producing a self-assessment report (SAR) that is then reviewed by a nominated panel of international experts who use a site visit to interview relevant stakeholders. The interviews aim at clarifying and gathering additional evidence. Based on the SAR, the information captured during the interviews together with additional information presented to the team, the panel has produced the following review report.

## SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT

The self-assessment process of AVEPRO was launched in June 2018. It involved the agency's entire staff, its Boards, and several stakeholders (comprising experts, representatives of students and ecclesiastical academic institutions). In order to ensure an informed and participative perspective, experts and advisors who have been regularly supporting the agency over numerous years were also engaged. Their role was mainly devoted to reviewing versions of the SAR and providing suggestions for improvement. Two general criteria steered the self-assessment process: (a) engagement and participation of relevant parties, including the Agency's staff and stakeholders, and (b) critical reflection, in a perspective of continuous improvement and enhancement. Particular attention was paid to the points raised in the follow-up reports to the 2014 ENQA external review report. Furthermore, the involved parties acknowledged the present and upcoming challenges facing the Agency, in the renewed context defined by the Apostolic constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* and by its "Norms of application".

The SAR was drafted by the AVEPRO Director, with the support of the Agency's staff, under the supervision of the President. The panel considers that the SAR was informative and very open and self-critical in many parts. The presentation of the rather complex and dynamic environment, in which the agency is operating – also in legal terms – was reflected well in the SAR and helped the panel understanding the context of AVEPRO's work.

## SITE VISIT

The site visit took place at AVEPRO premises in Rome on 3.-5. December 2019. The first day was used for an internal meeting of the panel to discuss and agree on issues that required further discussion and clarification during the interviews. During this preparation there was also a meeting with the Agency's President and Director to provide clarification on broader questions and the higher education system, thereby helping the panel to understand the global context AVEPRO works in as well as relevant background information regarding changes in the HE system of the Holy See with a particular reflection of the impact of *Veritatis Gaudium*.

Starting on 4 December, there were 12 meetings with different stakeholders with relevance to the activities of AVEPRO. These meetings included sessions with the:

- President and Director of AVEPRO,
- AVEPRO staff for evaluations,
- AVEPRO Board of Directors,
- Secretariat of State,
- Rectors, Pro-Rectors and Deans,
- Members of external evaluation commissions,
- Student representatives and student reviewers,
- Congregation for Catholic Education,
- Stakeholders and networks and Religious Superiors;
- QA Directors / Officers in Ecclesiastical Faculties,

· AVEPRO Scientific Council.

A full list of meetings, including the names of interviewees, can be found in Annex I to this report.

It should be mentioned that the atmosphere of the interviews was constructive and that questions were raised and replies were open. The panel especially appreciates the openness of interviewees who provided self-critical responses and ideas for the present and future which underline the potential and capacity of the organization to further enhance its activity. AVEPRO also supported the success of the site visit by creating a positive atmosphere that reflected well the mission of the agency to support a culture of quality.

In some instances, members of the groups interviewed by the panel required translation from English to Italian and vice versa. Hence, in these cases consecutive translation was used. The panel was aware of this procedure in advance and the timelines were planned accordingly. The interpreter was independent and ENQA agreed to him before the site visit took place.

## HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM OF THE AGENCY

### HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

HEIs of the Catholic Church are classified according to their *purpose* and the *content of their academic programmes*: (1) *Ecclesiastical Academic Institutions* (Universities and Faculties) and (2) *Catholic Universities and Faculties*.

- (1) *Ecclesiastical Academic Institutions* (Universities and Faculties) are governed by an academic legislation that is common throughout the world and it is based on the code of Canon Law and on the Apostolic constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* and its “Norms of application”. They have been canonically erected or approved by the Apostolic See, which foster and teach sacred doctrine and the sciences connected therewith, and which have the right to confer academic degrees by the authority of the Holy See. The ecclesiastical Faculties are: the Faculties of Theology, the Faculties of Canon Law, the Faculties of Philosophy and other Faculties which are listed in Art. 70 of the “Norms of application” of the Apostolic constitution *Veritatis Gaudium*.
- (2) *Catholic Universities and Faculties* are devoted, in the light of the Christian faith, to teaching and research in subjects that are commonly dealt with by universities. Such HEIs are regulated under different legal frameworks: the national academic legislation and organisation of the countries where they are located and, as regards their Catholic identity, the Code of Canon Law and the Apostolic constitution *Ex corde ecclesiae*. Catholic Universities and Faculties grant degrees in accordance with the civil authorities of the Countries in which they are established.

The distinction between the two different types of the Holy See’s HEIs implies that the CCE and AVEPRO have different responsibilities and duties with respect to accreditation and QA. As a matter of fact, the CCE is responsible for the accreditation of ecclesiastical academic Institutions, whilst the Agency is by law, and by Statute, responsible for the Quality Assurance/QA of the ecclesiastical Faculties. Only under specific conditions (Article 4 of the Statute), can the Agency assume such responsibility for other academic Institutions, such as Catholic universities.

The different types of HEI that are relevant for the work of AVEPRO can be found in the following table:

Type of HEI	Requirements	Diplomas and degrees
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UNIVERSITY	Four Ecclesiastical Faculties are needed to erect canonically an Ecclesiastical University	Three cycles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baccalaureate</li> <li>• Licentiate</li> <li>• Doctorate</li> </ul>
ATHENAEUMS	Three Ecclesiastical Faculties are needed to erect canonically an Ecclesiastical Athenaeum	Three cycles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baccalaureate</li> <li>• Licentiate</li> <li>• Doctorate</li> </ul>
SINGLE FACULTIES	Besides the Faculties of Theology, Canon Law, and Philosophy, other Faculties have been or can be canonically erected, according to the needs of the Church and with a view to attaining certain goals. For instance: <i>Christian Archaeology; Bioethics; Social Communications; Law; Christian and Classical Letters; Liturgy; Missiology; Sacred Music; Ancient Near Eastern Studies; Psychology; Educational Sciences; Religious Sciences; Social Sciences; Spirituality; Church History; Arabic and Islamic Studies; Biblical Studies; Oriental Studies; Studies on Marriage and the Family</i>	Three cycles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baccalaureate</li> <li>• Licentiate</li> <li>• Doctorate</li> </ul>
FACULTIES WITHIN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITIES or other STATE/PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES	Faculties erected or approved by the CCE which operate in the frame of a Catholic University or in another Institute of Higher Studies	Three cycles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baccalaureate</li> <li>• Licentiate</li> <li>• Doctorate</li> </ul>
AFFILIATED	Mainly theological Faculties	First-cycle degrees
AGGREGATED	Mainly theological Faculties	First- and Second-cycle degrees
INCORPORATED	Mainly theological Faculties	Second- and Third-cycle degrees
HIRS/ Higher Institutes of Religious Studies	HIRS are connected to a theological Faculty, which guarantees the quality of academic level and which confers the qualifications; the HIRS differs from the theological Faculty, because the study of religious sciences and the study of theology have different formative teachings and curricula.	First- and Second-cycle degrees

Ecclesiastical HEIs are located on five continents. At the global scale, as of 2017 the CCE indicates the presence of 792 Institutions of Higher Education, comprising 289 ecclesiastical Faculties and 503 “academic entities” related to them (affiliated, aggregated, incorporated and HIRS). AVEPRO explains

that currently the 289 ecclesiastical Faculties are the main *users* and *beneficiaries* of the agency's activities, with respect to quality evaluation and promotion.

## QUALITY ASSURANCE

The Holy See's academic system has two key actors in the field of quality assurance: the CCE and AVEPRO. Both actors have different tasks and responsibilities and consequently implement different activities. Generally it can be understood that CCE is in charge of accreditation of HEI belonging to the Holy See, while AVEPRO is tasked with the promotion and evaluation of the quality of these institutions.

Generally, the Holy See's academic system adopts formal criteria and practices for internal as well as external Quality Assurance.

The advancement achieved by the Holy See since September 2014 can be described alongside two different observations: (1) on the one hand, ecclesiastical HEIs have generally adopted and are implementing the QA methodology, toolset and support services provided by AVEPRO; and (2) on the other hand, AVEPRO's mandate has been further reinforced in the Apostolic constitution *Veritatis Gaudium*, strengthening its application throughout the Holy See's academic system.

Following *Veritatis Gaudium*, AVEPRO's evaluation has become mandatory for all ecclesiastical academic institutions. AVEPRO describes in its SAR that it focuses its attention to optimise its mandate as service and assistance for the ecclesiastical Universities, Faculties and other Institutions of higher education, to develop and design their quality assurance and management systems. Nevertheless, since AVEPRO is not responsible for the accreditation of HEIs, there are no direct consequences following the evaluation process. The report of evaluation is published on the agency's website and sent to the CCE, which is the authority that can proceed with a formal decision according to the evaluation results. CCE expressed that it considers the evaluations in their own decision-making process.

Following the promulgation of *Veritatis Gaudium*, consecutive legal acts, specifically CCE's Circular Letter nr. 1/2018 was published, adding specific indications for the appropriate and punctual implementation of the provisions outlined in *Veritatis Gaudium*. In this respect, the Circular Letter stressed that "all ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties throughout the world" are expected to implement AVEPRO's processes and procedures related to QA.

As the dimension of the higher education system of the Holy See is global, this implies an impact of the ESG also outside the EHEA. Therefore, AVEPRO has to manage the tension resulting from the need to comply with the European norms, while assuring the flexibility required by its worldwide scope of activities.

## AVEPRO

The Agency for the Evaluation and Promotion of Quality in Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties (AVEPRO), was established by the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI on 19 September 2007, which reflects the continuation and strengthening of the Holy See's adherence to the Bologna Process from 2003. The agency's legal form is foreseen already by the Apostolic constitution *Pastor bonus*, published already in 1988 and in its statutes that were last revised in 2015 defining the main features, scope and organs of AVEPRO. The third central document with a large impact on the present and future of the agency is the Apostolic constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* in its "Norms of application", as it states the nature and role of the Agency. It was published in January 2018. The publication of the Apostolic constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* has had a significant impact on the organisation of AVEPRO, thus leading the Agency to a revision of its guidelines for evaluation.

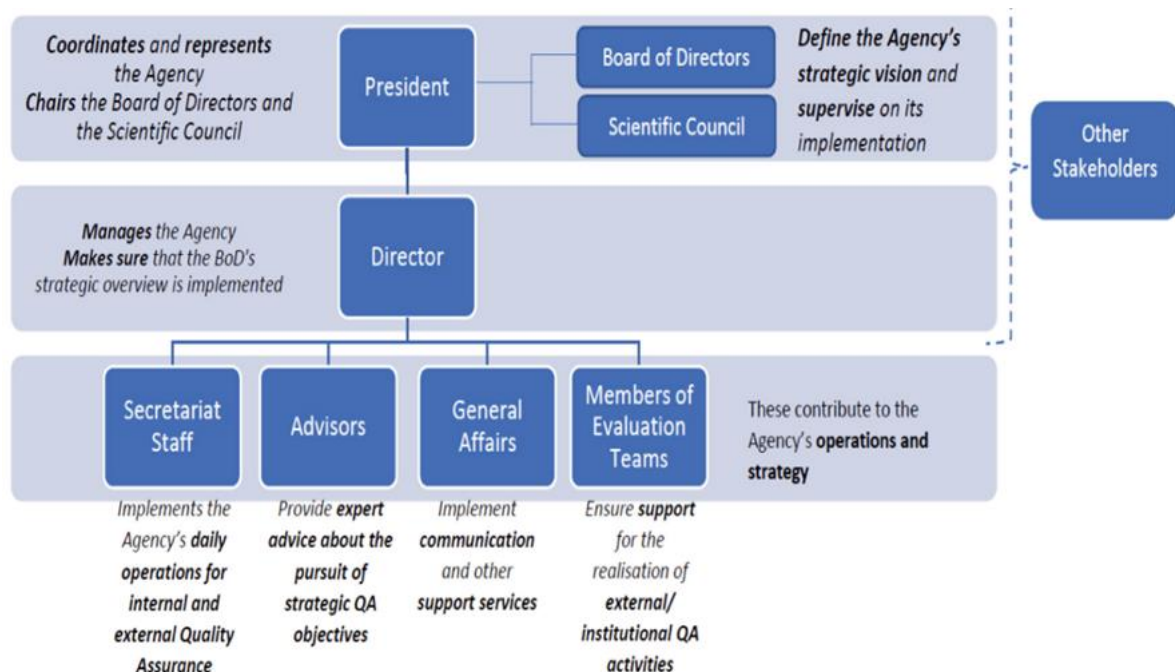
AVEPRO is mandated with two main tasks. It (1) promotes the quality of ecclesiastical academic Institutions to fulfil their mission and (2) evaluates the attainment of appropriate international standards. Art. 1, § 2 of the “Norms of application” of the Apostolic constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* (2018) reinforces this mission of AVEPRO to evaluate ecclesiastical academic institutions and thus puts its operations in a renewed formal framework. The fact that *Veritatis Gaudium* reinforces the importance of AVEPRO’s role is also testimony to the importance placed on quality assurance within the ecclesiastical academic system. To understand the agency, it is important to recognize that its remit relating to quality assurance procedures extends worldwide. Consequently, when considering the “national system” of AVEPRO, this system stretches across the globe. This makes the Agency’s mission, scope and geographical coverage unique in the field of quality assurance agencies.

## AVEPRO’S ORGANISATION/STRUCTURE

Following canon law and the international agreements in the area of Higher Education of which the Holy See is a signatory party, AVEPRO is set up as an independent organization in carrying out its activities. The Agency’s bodies comprise:

- the President
- the Board of Directors
- the Scientific Council.

AVEPRO’s structure also comprises the Director and other staff members. Additionally, AVEPRO uses the services of advisors and external experts. The following chart describes the internal organisation:



The Agency’s Statutes, from article 6 to 11, set out the roles and responsibilities of AVEPRO’s organs and staff. As defined there, the President is in charge of running and representing the agency. He is appointed by the Pope for a five-year term while the appointment is renewable only once.

Following Art. 10 of the Statutes of AVEPRO, the Director is appointed by the President of the Agency with the authorization of the Secretariat of State, which consults the Secretariat for the Economy. In the selection the “Regulation of the independent Evaluation Commission for the recruitment of lay personnel to the Apostolic See” has to be followed.

The Board of Directors, chaired by the President of the agency, approves the main orientations and supervises the activities of the Agency. The president is also trusted with monitoring the results of the work of the agency. The Board members are appointed for a five-year term, renewable once, by the Pope, to whom they are proposed by the President of AVEPRO. They have qualifications and experience both in academic areas and in the promotion of quality. The composition of the Board should also reflect, as far as possible, the various competences as well as the diversity and geographical extension of the Church. Following the statutes, the Board of Directors is composed of a minimum of five and a maximum of ten members.

The Scientific Council, chaired by the President of the Agency, is designed to help the president in the implementation of the Agency's activities. Following the statutes, the Scientific Council meets at least once every two years, when convened by the President. The President can also summon single members of the Scientific Council whenever needed or deemed convenient. The Scientific Council provides reasoned advice on the modalities used for quality evaluation, as well as on the choice and preparation of the experts in charge of evaluations.

The members of the two boards are selected on the basis of their competence and international reputation. AVEPRO describes in its SAR that usually they are well-known experts in HE aspects (e.g. Rectors, officers of international organization active in the field of education, leaders of QA Agencies, Presidents of universities, President or General Secretary of universities networks) or scholars active in research fields that are relevant to the Holy See Higher Education system (such as Theology or Philosophy). The statutes of the Agency foresee that in both bodies a student representative is appointed. In both cases they are full members and have the same rights and duties of the other members. Student representatives are appointed by the President in accordance with the proposal of the students' association of ecclesiastical faculties.

The advisors (as described in the chart above) are appointed by the President of the Agency, to carry out specific tasks and services related to internal Quality Assurance and to the enhancement of the Agency's operations.

## AVEPRO'S FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES, PROCEDURES

As defined by its statutes, AVEPRO has two pillars defining its activities: (1) quality evaluation and (2) quality promotion. The agency does not have any accreditation function, as, in the higher education system of the Holy See, this is the prerogative of the CCE. However, CCE will take into account the results of the external evaluations of individual institutions by AVEPRO when taking its decision about accreditation.

The first pillar of quality evaluation is realised through the organisation and implementation of institutional evaluations of the ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties. AVEPRO's procedures specify that the agency defines, develops and updates procedures for the internal and external evaluation and verification of quality; plans the external verification of quality in individual academic institutions and carries out said verification through the visits of experts, who, in turn, prepare final reports following guidelines issued by the Agency itself. It is also defined that AVEPRO selects, prepares and trains experts for the external evaluation visits.

To date, AVEPRO has evaluated 61 out of 128 institutions and 111 out of 197 Faculties of the ecclesiastical Institutions throughout Europe.

The agency coordinates the evaluations on a regional/national level, meaning that it undertakes evaluating institutions from a specific country/region at the same time. Considering that the number of institutions varies significantly from country to country, AVEPRO allows up to two years to complete an evaluation

cycle on the regional/national level. Academic institutions are expected to send their Self-Evaluation Report/SER to the Agency every five years. Under specific circumstances (reforms of the HE System, new laws or specific local situations) the foreseen period of five years could be reconsidered.

The evaluation procedure of AVEPRO is explained in the following table:

<b>Stage/Phase</b>	<b>WHO /Involved organisation</b>	<b>WHAT /Description of activity</b>	<b>WHEN /Period of implementation</b>	
<b>I. SELF-EVALUATION</b>	<b>INSTITUTION</b>	Appointment of the institutional apparatus – <b>Quality Committee/QC and Quality Office</b> for the entire QA Process	<b>18 months</b> prior to the site visit	
		Launch of <b>SELF-EVALUATION</b> and <b>SWOT ANALYSIS</b>	<b>12 months</b> prior to the site visit	
		<b>Conclusion of SELF-EVALUATION PREPARATION</b> of the <b>SER</b>	<b>6 months</b> prior to the site visit	
		<b>Sending the SER to AVEPRO</b>	<b>3 months</b> prior to the site visit	
<b>2. EXTERNAL EVALUATION</b>	<b>AVEPRO</b>	Appointment of the <b>EXTERNAL EVALUATION COMMISSION</b>	<b>At least 2 months</b> prior to the site visit	
	<b>INSTITUTION</b>	Establishment of <b>DATE</b> for site visit (contacts between the Institution and members of the EEC)	<b>At least 7 weeks</b> prior to the site visit	
	<b>AVEPRO</b>	<b>SER is sent to the EEC</b>	<b>At least 6 weeks</b> prior to the site visit	
	<b>EXTERNAL EVALUATION COMMISSION (EEC)</b>	<b>ANALYSIS</b> of the <b>SER</b> (using SER analysis FORM) <b>Exchange of ideas</b> regarding unanswered questions and issues to be dealt with during the site visit (among Commission members)	<b>From 6 weeks</b> prior to the site visit	
	<b>INSTITUTION</b>	Organisation of the Evaluation Commission's <b>travel and logistical arrangements</b>	<b>5 weeks</b> prior to the site visit	
	<b>INSTITUTION and EEC</b>	Definition of a <b>SCHEDULE</b> for the visit	<b>5 weeks</b> prior to the site visit	
	<b>EEC</b>	<b>SITE VISIT</b>	<b>FINAL DRAFT</b> of the evaluation report is sent to the Institution by the President of the Evaluation Commission	<b>By 6 weeks</b> after the end of the visit
		EEC draws up the <b>EVALUATION REPORT</b>		

	<b>INSTITUTION</b>	Any factual corrections to the evaluation report are <b>sent to the President of the EEC</b> within 2 weeks of receipt of the Report → In the case of objections deemed substantial by the Institution, appeal regarding the contents of the Report	<b>Within 8 weeks</b> after the end of the site visit (within 2 weeks of receipt of the Report)
	<b>EEC</b>	The President of the EEC <b>sends the evaluation report to AVEPRO</b> (definitive version)	<b>Within 8 weeks</b> after the end of the site visit
	<b>AVEPRO</b>	The <b>evaluation report is sent to the authorities:</b> the CCE, the Grand Chancellor and any other academic authorities, then <b>published on the Agency's website</b>	<b>Within 10 weeks</b> after the end of the site visit
<b>3. and 4. QUALITY IMPROVEMENT and STRATEGIC PLANNING</b>	<b>INSTITUTION</b>	Preparation of the <b>QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN/QIP</b>	<b>Within 6 months</b> after the end of the site visit
		Preparation and approval of the <b>STRATEGIC PLAN/SP</b>	<b>Within 12 months</b> after the end of the site visit
		<b>ANNUAL UPDATE of the SP</b>	<b>Every year</b>
		Confirmation or appointment of the members of the <b>Quality Committee and Quality Office</b>	<b>At least 18 months prior</b> to the new site visit

The second pillar of AVEPRO's activity is the promotion of quality. The agency supports academic Institutions in improving the quality of their research and teaching; favours the dissemination of information in academic fields; and proposes appropriate instruments for the promotion of quality.

In the Agency's perspective these two pillars are related to enhancement processes which belong to the promotion of a shared cultural framework. In this interpretation the promotion of quality starts with a QA process and it achieves realisation when the academic institution uses the recommendations of the external evaluation commission in order to redefine its strategic objectives.

It is important to point out that, according to the legislation of the Holy See, the activities of quality evaluation and promotion are not related solely to the activities of teaching and learning under the ESG. They also include activities in the field of third mission and research, but according to Veritatis Gaudium also everything that allows those who attend an ecclesiastical Faculty to be part of a "community of study, research and formation". In this respect, the activities of the Agency form a mechanism in which evaluation, promotion and dissemination of the quality culture are interrelated, and are supposed to provide the backbone for the institutional evaluation of the universities and ecclesiastical Faculties.

## AVEPRO'S FUNDING

AVEPRO is financed from the budget of the Holy See. In 2019, the budget was approximately EUR 337.000. Within the administration of the Vatican the responsible unit is the Secretariat for the Economy, to which the Agency sends a forecast of activities and expenditure every three months. The SAR explains that in the event of unplanned activities AVEPRO can ask for additional financial resources. These data have to be seen in light of the special tax system that the Holy See has due to the Lateran Pacts.

AVEPRO charges no fees to the institutions it works for. Members of the external evaluation commissions act as volunteers without any financial compensation and the logistical expenses for the panels are covered by the institutions directly.

# FINDINGS: COMPLIANCE OF AVEPRO WITH THE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA (ESG)

## ESG PART 3: QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES

### ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY, AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

Standard:

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.

#### Evidence

AVEPRO's mission/statute is published together with its strategic plan 2015 - 2019, which is available on its website. Both documents outline quality assurance in the broader context of enhancement and development of a quality culture as central elements. The strategic plan is operationalized by a timetable allowing transparency for the progress in each of the outlined action areas.

A further document, more detailed and comprehensive in nature, is also published online: "Guidelines: Nature, context, purpose, standards and procedures of Quality evaluation and promotion (Guidelines A)". It contextualizes the work of AVEPRO and also builds the framework for further documents explaining the steps and procedures in more detail. As explained during the interviews with institutions, these documents are known to, and used by, the stakeholders as they referred to them. Additional contextualization and reasoning for the work and procedures of the agency are given in the so-called *rationale* that is an integral part of AVEPRO's guidelines. This fifth part of AVEPRO's guidelines aims to illustrate the characteristics of AVEPRO's institutional mindset permeating all the procedures within the specific system of the evaluation and promotion of quality in ecclesiastical HE institutions.

The publicly available documents explain the internal structure of the agency, its governing bodies, and the nature of the work, particularly in relation to other relevant institutions, as well as the details regarding the organization of evaluation cycles in the different contexts in which the agency is working. These documents are explained to be the focal points for both the ecclesiastical academic institutions as well as the appointed review panels (SAR p.37).

As part of their operations and in light of internal reflections, AVEPRO has developed the so-called „Regional/National procedure model“ (annex to the SAR and also available online) in which it focuses its activities on institutions in the same region or country, in order to optimize the reflection of specific cultural, legal and administrative contexts as well as to facilitate the dialogue with the relevant actors and involve stakeholders of regional/national relevance.

In its SAR as well as during the interviews, AVEPRO also explains the involvement of stakeholders into the agency's structures, particularly highlighting students as being represented in the Board of Directors as well as its Scientific Council. The role of external stakeholders' authorities, Religious Orders, or Episcopal Conferences was also highlighted, and the interviews during the site visit confirmed that the agency is in active exchange with these institutions and its role was described to be proactive by the stakeholders.

#### Analysis



Based on the evidence provided and that which is publicly available on the website, external quality assurance activities are at the heart of the mission of AVEPRO. Also, considering the reports published on the website of the agency, it becomes obvious that - besides the promotion of quality - its second key mission lies in running external quality assurance procedures. Considering the methodology implemented and also the set-up of the procedure on the operational level, the panel concludes that the aspect of enhancement and support of the development of a quality culture in institutions is a key feature in AVEPRO's activities. This becomes even more obvious when considering that, besides running procedures and producing reports, promotion of quality is a big part of the agency's activities which is also reflected in the mission statement. The panel believes that this is well in line with the statements of different interviewees during the site visit.

The panel is convinced that the approach of the agency to create trust as a foundation for any further activities is vital, as within the context of the higher education system of the Holy See AVEPRO very much relies on "soft power". As the geographical and cultural diversity within the HE system of the Holy See creates complexity, well targeted promotional activities, often relying on face to face dialogue, will remain crucial when implementing activities that set the foundation for the work of the agency in light of *Veritatis Gaudium*.

The experts panel recognizes that consistently all interviewees expressed their trust in the work of the agency and the people involved. The panel sees that this is clearly a result of an intense communicative effort and the numerous promotional activities of AVEPRO. This is not only in line with the agency's mission statement but, in the understanding of the expert panel, also a very commendable approach, as it recognises the diversity of the institutions the agency works with and for. In this line, the panel also believes that the approach of AVEPRO to evaluate institutions in the same country/region almost at the same time is a helpful approach to increasing the efficiency of operations and trust in the outcomes. At the same time, it is a pragmatic approach to deal with the complexity of the educational system AVEPRO works in, as it bundles comparable challenges and allows for focussed discussions with institutions about challenges and opportunities presented by their geographic position and cultural context. This positive impression is rounded by the very well written and audience-oriented rationale for the work of the agency that is used as part of the standard documentation in their guidelines (Guideline E).

### **Panel commendations**

The panel commends AVEPRO for the good exchange with and involvement of a great array of stakeholders.

The panel commends AVEPRO for the trust institutions and stakeholders have in their work.

### **Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

## ESG 3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS

Standard:

Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognised as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.

### **2014 review recommendation**

Given the global presence of ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties, and the possibility of articulation into the regional subcomponents, the Agency is encouraged to discuss, together with relevant administrative bodies in the Holy See's structures, the necessary prerequisites for the greater international visibility and

active involvement in ENQA.

## Evidence

According to the Apostolic Constitution Pastor Bonus of 1988, AVEPRO has the status of entities linked to the Holy See (art. 186 and 190-191). Moreover, AVEPRO's activities are in line with the Apostolic Constitution Sapientia christiana (15 April 1979). In its SAR, AVEPRO explains that since its creation in 2007, AVEPRO has had a clear standing within the Holy See's institutional framework. The Agency was erected by the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI through the official document "chirographum" signed on 19 September 2007.

The 2018 Apostolic constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* further develops AVEPRO's mandate and tasks. Art. 1. § 2 of the "Norms of application" explains that "Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties, as well as other institutions of higher education, are usually subjected to the evaluation of the Agency of the Holy See for the Evaluation and Promotion of Quality (AVEPRO)".

The statutes of the agency regulate that the Agency is endowed with a canonical public juridical personality and Vatican civil juridical personality (art. 1, §4) and has its registered office in the Vatican City State (§5). The statutes are publicly available on AVEPRO's website.

As outlined in the SAR, as well as during interviews, the activities of AVEPRO are global in scale due to the geographical spread of the ecclesiastical higher education system. Consequently, during the implementation of its activities different legal frameworks and international conventions, agreements and initiatives which the Holy See adheres to, have to be considered.

## Analysis

The status of AVEPRO is well defined in its founding legal framework. The legal basis of the agency is well-established, and it is recognized by authorities within the Holy See. Beyond the evidence that is represented by legal documents mentioned above, the panel believes that the relevance of the status of the agency indeed grew since the last ENQA review. The panel believes that the explicit mandate to the agency through *Veritatis Gaudium* further deepens the inclusion of the agency in the higher education system of the Holy See. At the same time the panel believes that these additional tasks reflect the systemic recognition of the relevance of the agency's work.

This impression of continuous consolidation was also confirmed during the interviews with the Congregation for Catholic Education. The activities of AVEPRO are supported and the results and reports contribute towards the achievement of shared goals for the higher education institutions of the Holy See without interfering with the independence of AVEPRO.

The panel also positively recognizes that AVEPRO, not only in fulfilling its promotional mission, held workshops and meetings in various countries in the past years and has also become a visible actor in networks for quality assurance contributing to greater international visibility of the agency.

## Panel conclusion: fully compliant

### ESG 3.3 INDEPENDENCE

Standard:

Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.

## Evidence

The SAR explains that AVEPRO's organisational independence derives from the 2017 Apostolic constitution *Veritatis Gaudium*, where the role of the Agency with respect to quality evaluation is defined. Also, article 2 of AVEPRO statutes outlines that “the Agency enjoys autonomy in its performance of the activities provided for in this statute”.

Following the statutes, all key positions of AVEPRO (President, the Board of Directors and the Scientific Council) are directly appointed by the Pope, acting as Head of State and thus granting the highest level of autonomy and legitimisation. The Board of Directors of AVEPRO also consists of members of the Congregation for Catholic Education (CCE), educational institutions, and students. All have equal voting rights without any veto options.

On the operational level, the definition of procedures and their implementation fall under the responsibility of the bodies of AVEPRO – which include different stakeholders. The statutes foresee that all expert panels are nominated by the Agency and the panel learnt during the interviews on site that it is the President who appoints all expert panels.

The reports of external evaluation commissions represent the final outcome of a procedure when it comes to safeguarding the independence of outcomes. Consequently the independence of outcomes is strongly linked to the independence of external reviewers as well as the independence of the implementation of the steps of the evaluation procedure. As explained above and in the SAR, AVEPRO plans and implements its activities autonomously and directly contacts with ecclesiastical academic Institutions to set up specific evaluation activities; it directly liaises with local stakeholders (e.g. the Episcopal Conferences, the Rectors' Conferences; local Associations of students of ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties, etc.), and it takes all steps to arrange external evaluations itself.

In order to strengthen the independence and autonomy of individual experts, the SAR explains that a set of learning resources and toolsets are available to familiarise experts with the specific procedures (e.g. e-learning on the role of experts, support documents to analyse the self-evaluation reports, tools to support evaluation commissions in the preparation of reports etc.).

Also, regarding the second major pillar in AVEPRO's work, the promotion of quality, the SAR explains that the agency plans and implements these activities autonomously. It sets the strategic objectives (i.e. in the multi-annual Strategic Plan) to disseminate the quality culture at a global level, selecting the continents and the countries where ecclesiastical academic institutions show a greater need for awareness-raising, in-depth information and promotion activities. During the interviews the panel learnt that many of the operational decisions and preparations for the documents approved by the Board of Directors are prepared by the President and Director of AVEPRO.

## Analysis

In light of the specific nature of the higher education system of the Holy See, the geographic spread of its system, the complexity of different types of institutions within it, understanding potential interdependencies between actors was an important focus of the analysis. Particular attention was paid to the agency's relationship towards Congregation for Catholic Education (CCE), as both entities work in the same field while having different responsibilities that are somehow related to each other. As described earlier, it is the CCE's task to accredit institutions, while AVEPRO is focussed on evaluating and supporting further development in the field of quality of institutions. As CCE is one of the key stakeholders of the agency and one representative of this Dicastery is also an ex officio member of the Board of Directors, operational independence from CCE can be seen as *conditio sine qua non* for the successful implementation of the mission of AVEPRO. At the same time, AVEPRO needs to interact with CCE as a key stakeholder in many aspects and also cooperates with them in order to facilitate procedures for institutions.

Based on the interviews with CCE, but also with the institutions and other members of the Board and

Scientific Council, the panel concludes that AVEPRO manages to keep that balance and its independence very well. The need for cooperation and active exchange will even increase under the growing impact of *Veritatis Gaudium*. To that end, independence cannot mean a limitation of substantial exchange, but much more a balanced interaction based on independent self-regulation, which AVEPRO has implemented effectively. Consequently, the panel concludes that the legally established independence is also translated into an appropriate operational independence of the work of the agency.

No third-party interaction could be identified that would endanger independence. A particularity in AVEPRO's structure is the direct appointment of both boards and the President by the Pope. In light of the design and inner logic of the higher education system of the Holy See as well as its presence in many different national legislations the panel concluded that this practice is a safeguard for independence. In addition, the panel learnt that CCE considers the reports of AVEPRO as part of their own decision-making process. In some cases, even the evaluation cycles of AVEPRO and CCE were harmonized in order to decrease the burden on institutions.

Based on the documentation provided and on the publicly available reports, the expert panel also found no evidence for any concerns regarding the independence of the experts. Interviews with institutions that were recently reviewed as well with the reviewers themselves proved that reviewers operate as individual experts based on their expertise without any third-party interest.

When considering the independence of outcomes it is important to recognize that AVEPRO offers evaluations and no accreditations, consequently there is no decision at the end of the procedure. The final result of the evaluation is the report of the external evaluation commission. Consequently the independence of the panel assessment is directly linked to the independence of the evaluators as well as the operational independence. In both areas the panel found no reason for concern.

An observation that the panel wants to share in light of independence is the key role(s) of the president of the agency. The panel learnt that many operational successes rely on the way the president manages them, drawing on great diplomatic skills and experience. With the current structure and size of the agency, it seems reasonable to focus key decision-making in this position. The role of AVEPRO is undoubtedly growing under the new mandate of *Veritatis Gaudium*, however, the agency might consider diversifying the responsibility for key decisions in order to avoid congestion of current structures and indirectly creating dependencies. It is of utmost importance to the panel to underline that there was no evidence or any indication of a dysfunctionality of the current structure due to the clearly perceived professionalism and balanced approach of the current leadership of the agency. Yet, sharing some responsibilities among more actors in the long run might strengthen the structure. Additional and more specific thoughts will be further elaborated under ESG 2.5.

**Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

### ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Standard:

Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.

#### **Evidence**

AVEPRO produces three different types of analytical reports:

1. Analysis of self-assessment reports and external evaluation reports
2. Summary of evaluations by regional/national area
3. Working papers and publications on specific topics.

In the SAR as well as during the interviews, AVEPRO explained that for reasons of confidentiality these reports are not open to the broader public as downloads from its website, but instead they are published for the relevant stakeholders which are outlined to be a) ecclesiastical academic Institutions; b) governing authorities, such as the CCE; c) Orders, Episcopal Conferences; and d) experts involved in evaluation commissions.

Regarding the nature of the reports AVEPRO explains that the first group of thematic analyses, “Analysis of self-assessment reports and external evaluation reports”, includes the 2012-2014 and 2014-2016 reports in which about 80 SARs and as many external evaluation reports are analysed. The conclusions in these reports are addressed to the Agency itself, to the Evaluation Commissions and to the academic institutions evaluated. The SAR outlines that based on these reports a revision of the evaluation system was proposed by the Agency, and it has determined the definition of operational tools and formats for use by both the institutions and the Evaluation Commissions. It has also contributed to the identification of themes to be further analysed and discussed in specific working papers. The panel learnt during the interviews that the analyses were even taken into account when formulating *Veritatis Gaudium*.

The second group of documents, “Summary of assessments by regional/national area”, is explained to contain analyses relating to specific geographical areas in which the evaluation process has been carried out. At the time, the Agency has produced reports about Italy, Rome and Spain. These documents describe the peculiarities that emerged in the region, highlight areas of attention and are mainly aimed at stakeholders who operate in that specific area. They are also supposed to help the Agency, the CCE and the Secretariat of State to better understand the local situations and adapt approaches and interactions with local stakeholders with regard to the higher education system and policies.

The third group of documents, “Working papers and publications on specific topics”, groups three different types of papers, namely Reports on the activities carried out by the Agency that are also published on the website, Working papers for which the initial need is articulated from stakeholders, in particular from the ecclesiastical academic institutions that invited AVEPRO to elaborate some reference papers on urgent topics, i.e. strategic planning or possible evolutions of the organisation of the III cycle.

## **Analysis**

The panel understands that the assessment of this standard cannot take place without recognizing that one of the missions of the agency is the promotion of quality amongst ecclesiastical institutions. Consequently, the panel understands that adequate reporting cannot be understood solely in the context of the lessons learnt from the external reviews but has to be seen in the broader context of the mission of AVEPRO.

The panel found numerous different formats in which AVEPRO analyses the findings and trends as well as needs beyond the individual procedures in a structured way. It is recognized that the agency did not decide to implement a unified approach towards reporting, which the panel believes is a sound response to the complexity of the system it works in and for. The panel believes that the chosen approach is oriented towards the needs of the different external and internal stakeholders. Evidence shows that the Board of Directors look at the aggregated reports and that this analysis leads to continuous improvement internally. In other cases, aggregated papers were the basis for moderated dialogue amongst stakeholders in the relevant context (e.g. Spain).

The panel states with great appreciation that AVEPRO manages to produce reports that have an impact. Based on an analysis of the agency in Italy the cooperation with the local Episcopal Conference aimed at reducing the number of Higher Institutes of Religious Studies operating in the country. This process has resulted in the reduction of around 50% of those kind of institutions.

The panel also discussed with the different stakeholders in the interviews the extent to which they are aware of reports and analysis and found that stakeholders actually read and consider the reports of the agency, as they feel that they contribute by adding external perspective and that they highlight good practice as well as consistent difficulties. It could also be recognized that part of the analysis of the agency found direct reflection in the formulation of *Veritatis Gaudium*.

The Panel found that the agency had adopted a clear strategic approach to the publication of thematic reports. While they are not published in so far as the wider public is concerned there is appropriate circulation to a range of critical stakeholders, as identified by the Agency. The reports themselves reflect topics of obvious relevance to the stakeholder groups, addressing their needs and, in the view of the panel, having a visible impact. The panel did come to the view however that the Agency would benefit from a more systematic approach to the selection of areas and issues warranting thematic analysis.

Consequently, the panel is convinced that the agency has found a sound mechanism to produce thematic analysis that is of relevance and interest to the key stakeholders and can show impact.

**Suggestion for further improvement:**

The panel encourages AVEPRO to share wider and more easily accessible the lessons that can be drawn from operating on a truly international level also to the international QA community.

**Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

### ESG 3.5 RESOURCES

Standard:

Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.

#### 2014 review recommendation

The team concludes that the development of the review processes and procedures, to meet the needs of the medium and long-term future, will require additional financial resources and significantly increased staffing resources. We recommend that this matter receives the urgent attention of the appropriate offices in the Holy See.

The Agency together with relevant units within the Holy See's administrative structures are encouraged to further take actions to secure appropriate staff and other resources enabling to fulfil AVEPRO duties on a five-yearly basis. AVEPRO could also engage in joint activities and benefit from mutual learning with other agencies members of ENQA.

When talking to esteemed members of the Board of Directors and the Scientific Council, the Panel saw their dedication to serve the Agency and also willingness to contribute to reconsideration of the current arrangements of these two advisory bodies to more energetically support the Agency's work, at the same time permitting some saving of resources.

#### Evidence

AVEPRO explains in its SAR (p.44) that the situation since the last review has evolved. In 2015 the agency had two full-time employees and an additional employee with a non-fixed term contract and it had an operational budget of approximately 209.000 Euro. At the time of the current review AVEPRO's staff comprises four full-time positions with permanent contracts, while a fifth position is currently subject to a scoping exercise. Furthermore, there are two part-time advisors supporting the secretariat. Based on the budgets provided, in 2019 it stood at approximately 337.000 Euro (AVEPRO Budget 2015-2019). The SAR further explains that every three months the agency sends a forecast of activities and expenditure to the Secretariat for the Economy of the Holy See and that in case of unplanned activities in need of being implemented, the Agency can ask for additional financial resources. This was also confirmed during interviews with the Director of AVEPRO.

The SAR explains that AVEPRO's statutes assign "operational" tasks to the members of the two Councils, creating the availability of support to the Agency by well-established specialists in their field. Experts in the evaluation panel offer their services for free, allowing AVEPRO not to charge any cost to the academic institutions being evaluated (except for the cost of travel, board and lodging and other living expenses).

The panel could also see the office and meeting space available to AVEPRO and the SAR (p.45) outlines that on the practical level other stakeholders also contribute to the resources of AVEPRO by providing logistical support for meetings, providing rooms or additional spaces. The panel also learnt that the International Federation of Catholic Universities supported the agency with the provision of professional interpreters for the Spanish and French version of the agency's website.

During the interviews with the Scientific Council the panel learnt that the Council did not meet in the years between 2016 and 2018. According to the art. 9 §4 of the Agency's Statute, the Council meets when necessary or at least once every two years. During that period, the mandate of the Scientific Council in office had expired. Due to procedural reasons, the appointment of the new members took a longer span of time than expected. This circumstance is not attributable to the responsibility of the Agency. The council members expressed their strong support for the mission and work of AVEPRO offering support in addressing some areas for development that the agency has identified.

Despite the significant increase and positive development since the last review the SAR (p.45) and the interviews with staff and management identified that the current financial and human resources do not correspond with the task and broad mission of AVEPRO. This is especially true in respect of AVEPRO's increasing global remit and the need to provide a broader range of support and services to a highly dispersed group of institutions, which was recognised by interviewees as a priority for the agency. In addition there are tasks, for instance in relation to the training of experts, that the Agency, together with their stakeholders, recognised would benefit from enhanced provision that can only be brought about by greater levels of resources.

## **Analysis**

When considering the resource situation of the agency the panel first has to acknowledge two specificities of AVEPRO that are based on the system it works in and for: Networking and Voluntarism. Networking: Due to the promotional mission of the agency and in light of the limited resources (particularly when compared to the size of its academic system) AVEPRO's management succeeds well in working with stakeholders and convincing them of the added value of its activities leading to the availability of additional resources and creating support for the cause of AVEPRO. The panel recognizes with great appreciation that in the context of the work of AVEPRO many individuals volunteer with the idea of being at the service of a greater good. This allows the agency, for example, to benefit from highly renowned evaluators in their panels without paying any fees, thus optimizing the use of resources. In addition, the agency also makes use of such volunteers for report writing, editing, translations and many other tasks.

At the same time, the panel recognizes that the staff situation is rather minimal, and that there were no redundancies, considering the amount of work. In light of the *Veritatis Gaudium*, there is no disagreement between the panel and all interviewed stakeholders as well as agency leadership, that the work to be done will rather increase than decrease in the coming years. Already, the system heavily relies on outsourcing many of the aspects to voluntary-outsiders and the panel complements the current staff for their ability to motivate and convince third parties and outsiders of the benefit of support and collaboration.

At the same time, the evaluations offered by AVEPRO are cyclical and require repeat visits after five years, meaning that many of the institutions that underwent a review some four or five years ago, should be expected to return very soon. Due to the size of the system, in addition, the near future will clearly require additional evaluation activities outside of Europe which will mean that new institutions to be evaluated will join institutions that will have to undergo re-evaluation. This will further tighten the staff situation. Consequently, the already existing gap between work to be done and staff/resources will grow significantly with the success of the agency.

The panel recognizes and that it is not the intention of the agency to immediately cover the whole system

with its work, but instead create sustainable impact by steadily supporting the institutions following trust building activities. However, also in light of this approach, there is a gap between the mission that is very broad and global, and the available resources. Trying to define the extent of this gap however is very hard, because the operational plan of the agency is very much demand driven which challenges any long-term planning. At the same time, it has to be stated, that all reasonably expectable scenarios imply a growing workload. In the view of the Panel the Agency must take a more purposeful approach to modelling future work and activity in order to understand more precisely where shortfalls will occur but also to make the case for additional funding to the appropriate bodies.

Furthermore, the panel recognizes that the Scientific Council has not met in the past three years, implying that available resources are not used to the best of their capacity. The panel considers that the efficient management of the Scientific Council would require some investment of resources by the agency, as the meetings of the Council require substantive preparation, and since the Council members themselves are volunteers, the results and output of these meetings will also require implementation, which leads to an increase in the workload. It seems that the available staff resources are already at such a minimum, that any extra activity is put aside due to necessary, everyday operations. The planned extra staff position will make available more work hours and extra talent, reducing the resource gap, however it will only be one step in what requires a more elaborate resource planning in light of the developing work plan. It is obvious to the panel that the future growth of work will require a growth of budget.

### **Panel recommendations**

AVEPRO should define a work plan and connect required resources to it in order to balance and plan activities and required resources. This will help to specify the realistic need of additionally required resources.

AVEPRO should better use the potential of the Scientific Council, define a meeting interval and adhere to it.

### **Panel suggestion for further improvement:**

The panel advises AVEPRO to assess its current governance and organisational structure (e.g. two boards with potentially overlapping duties) in order to make even better use of the expert knowledge the agency can draw upon.

### **Panel conclusion: partially compliant**

## ESG 3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Standard:

Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.

### **Evidence**

AVEPRO explains in its SAR (p.46) that it invested many resources and much time in the past twelve years to build a good reputation and to be *accountable* to its stakeholders, the ecclesiastical community, the international community and society in general. This is put in context of the fact that all the employees of the Holy See must comply with and adopt the General Regulations of the Roman Curia, and also have the substantial obligation to abide by a conduct of work and ethical life which is adequate to their responsibilities (SAR p.46). AVEPRO explains that it has built its internal QA policy based on the following pillars (SAR p.46):

1. regular monitoring of in-progress and planned activities, coupled with a critical outlook aimed at redefining processes, procedures and relationships;



2. specific processes of inclusion, involvement and exchange with its stakeholders who are asked to offer feedback that stimulates and inspires the Agency in a path of continuous improvement;
3. preparation of the self-assessment report, according to the regulatory framework governing the Agency's relations with international Institutions or associations (art 12 §3 AVEPRO Statute);
4. support to the staff's continuous professional development as a key component of the Agency's competence and reliability.

The first pillar is described to be based on an *internal management structure*. It is based on the fact that the Agency staff is also engaged in the critical overview of the performed activities and so the staff meets once a week to exchange and reflect on practices and experiences. This practice is explained to have several positive effects, like faster and more efficient communication and it also allowed a better monitoring of the stakeholders' involvement, due to the close communication. The panel could also see this when reading the minutes of the weekly meetings.

The second pillar is based on the *collection and exchange of stakeholders' feedback* as AVEPRO regularly forwards reports about its activities to the Secretariat of State and to the CCE. The SAR explains that these Institutions return their feedback in the form of suggestions, annotations and informal comments. Furthermore feedback is sought and collected from other Institutions, such as the Episcopal Conferences, the Students Association of the Roman Pontifical Universities (SUPR), and the expert members of the Evaluation Commissions.

The SAR outlines that the third pillar of AVEPRO's internal QA policy is directly related to Article 12 of its Statutes and to the obligation to go through *periodic self-evaluation processes*. This is explained to be initiated by the ENQA-coordinated review. The fourth pillar is focussing on the *Agency's need for continuous staff development*, assuming that only well-trained and competent staff and managers can contribute to the internal quality (SAR p 47).

Besides the presentation of the internal quality assurance in the SAR, the panel learnt during the interviews that evaluators can provide feedback about their experience with the review process, but also with other evaluators to the Director of the agency. The same reflection was provided by the representatives of the institution who had undergone a review, explaining that the agency staff is extremely open to receive feedback on their experience. Also, in some of the cooperative events with other stakeholders institutions exchange their experiences and AVEPRO staff encourage this open expression in order to further improve its operations.

## **Analysis**

The internal quality assurance of AVEPRO is designed in a way that it comprises a much more holistic understanding of internal quality assurance than just a focus on the evaluation procedures the agency implements. It appears to the panel that indeed the implemented approach is one of open channels with all agency staff willing to listen to stakeholders, institutions, and also evaluators. As one of the missions of the agency is promotion of quality culture, constant exchange with institutions and stakeholders is part of its operations. This exchange is also used to discuss current experiences, and identify rooms for improvement.

In a narrower understanding of a well-developed internal quality assurance mechanism, it can be argued that the panel found very little evidence of systemic learning of the agency and fully developed feedback loops that systematically cover the evaluation or the evaluators. Instead the focus is on a less formalized way of exchange. This goes together with the mission of the agency to promote quality itself, which means that there is a strong focus on building trust which includes lots of communication and exchange. Based on the discussions with the institutions, but also the stakeholders, this approach seems to be very fitting for the educational system the agency works in.

The panel also found good confirmation in the interviews that there is appropriate communication with relevant authorities. In fact, the implemented mechanisms also help to assure that the people involved in the procedure act professionally and ethically. The panel also believes that the weekly staff meetings in the agency represent an important part of the current internal quality assurance mechanism of AVEPRO.

However - as described above - some major feedback loops are centred around individual acts of communication either orally or in emails. The panel believes that this approach is not very systematic nor well structured. Although it is clearly very well rooted in the overall system, and it is the result of an agency being well embedded in the academic system and stakeholders put a lot of trust in its work, the current approach lacks perspective.

The panel believes that AVEPRO clearly strives towards the development of an internal quality culture, which in light of the specific context of the work of the agency might not immediately show the added value of a more structured and systematic approach of internal quality assurance. The panel also believes that the tight resource situation of the agency may limit the implementation of a more elaborate and systematic internal quality assurance approach. Particularly in light of the diversity of the academic systems AVEPRO is confronted with and the expected growth in procedures. The panel therefore recommends AVEPRO take a more systematic approach to internal quality assurance and make sure that evaluation cycles regarding its own operations are closed and well documented.

#### **Panel commendations**

The panel applauds AVEPRO's approach of constant stakeholder dialogue as a means for keeping the agency relevant and reflexive.

#### **Panel recommendations**

AVEPRO should take a more systematic and formalized approach in its IQA efforts.

#### **Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

### ESG 3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES

Standard:

Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.

#### **Evidence**

According to Art. 12 of its Statute, every five years AVEPRO is supposed to prepare a self-evaluation report. The last external evaluation by ENQA took place in 2014. The agency explained that particularly for this current review efforts had been made to ensure that AVEPRO's self-evaluation process was very inclusive, involving all of the Agency's staff, members of the Scientific Council and Board of Directors, and different stakeholders. The self-evaluation report is also published on the agency's website.

In its SAR, AVEPRO explains that in order to achieve ENQA full membership in 2014, AVEPRO has adopted the ESG as criteria guiding its practices for continuous improvement and enhancement of its QA processes and procedures. This also implies that AVEPRO has to undergo regularly an external evaluation against international standards.

#### **Analysis**

The panel confirms that AVEPRO currently undergoes an external review while the last review happened in 2014. The agency asked for one year of extension to the regular five year interval, on the grounds of

Veritatis Gaudium being just implemented, and thus the agency was in the process of revising its procedures. The panel particularly highlights that AVEPRO chose to use the statutory requirement for a self-evaluation to undergo an external review following the European Standards and Guidelines. The panel is well aware that the agency, which has a global scope of activities due to the globalised and diversified higher education system of the Holy See, needs to reflect this systemic, global diversity in its working methodologies in order to avoid the perception of being Eurocentric.

In light of the cyclical nature of the external review, the panel also highlights the reflective meetings that the director and president had with the panel. The SWOT analysis prepared by AVEPRO can be seen as a positive example of the agency's capacity to reflect itself.

**Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

## **ESG PART 2: EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE**

### **ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE**

Standard:

External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part I of the ESG.

#### **2014 review recommendation**

AVEPRO should revisit its review methodology to more fully encompass expectations for internal Quality Assurance arrangements within all types of Higher Education Institutions as laid down in ESG part I.

#### **Evidence**

AVEPRO points out that through the promotion of quality culture, the agency has created a system of relations within the greater part of ecclesiastical academic institutions achieving a high degree of acceptance amongst institutions and has become a reputed partner for HEIs with expertise in the field of quality (SAR p.53).

In achieving its two-part mission of evaluation and promotion, AVEPRO has developed a set of Guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance, serving as a source of knowledge for the ecclesiastical academic institutions with a clear framework for internal QA. AVEPRO also describes that since 2015 it has adapted its guidelines and toolsets embedding a culture of accountability and responsibility, which has replaced an approach that was more control-oriented. (SAR p.49) The system proposed by AVEPRO foresees for institutions to possess a quality policy assuming that institutions are responsible for the development of their internal quality: with the contribution of students and other internal stakeholders, institutions are expected to evaluate all their activities, including study programmes, the organisation and volume of research, innovation, management, funding systems and services. (SAR p.49). Consequently, the evaluation approach of AVEPRO is not concentrated on teaching and learning, but instead focuses on the entire institution with all its different dimensions. In order to demonstrate the alignment of AVEPRO procedures with part I of the ESG, the agency has prepared an alignment table that due to its promotional mission, does not only compare the AVEPRO guidelines, but also the guidelines for self -valuation of the institutions as well as the guidelines for evaluators with the ESG. The alignment table that was carefully studied and compared with the referencing original materials by the panel, reads as follows:

ESG 2015		INSTITUTION		COMMISSION
Standard	Specific elements	AVEPRO GUIDELINES	Guidelines for SELF-EVALUATION	Specific TOOL: SER Analysis form
1.1	Policy for QA	§ "Summary and value of the Process" Part 1 § 1. Part 1 § 2. Part 1 § 3.2 Part 2 § 4. Part 3 § 5. Part 3 § 6. Part 3 § 7. Part 3 § 8.	§ "Introduction" § "Contents of the SER" "3. Quality Assurance/QA policies" § "SER and external evaluation visit" § "SER and strategic planning" § "SER Model" § Annexes to the SER: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 - Faculty organigram</li> </ul>	Introduction (b.-d.) 1 (e., h., i.) 2 (a.-g.) 3 (a.-e.)
1.2	The design and approval of study programmes	Part 1 § 2.	§ "Contents of the SER" "4. General overview regarding programs: education, multi-disciplinary, inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary approaches" § "Contents of the SER" "5. Strategies and modes of learning and the centrality of students" § "Contents of the SER" "7. Learning and teaching: definition of study plans, their monitoring and review, appreciation of teaching staff" § "Contents of the SER" "8. Research and scholarship, support for the creation of research centers" {VG} § "Contents of the SER" "10. Contributions to the outside world/third mission activities" {VG} § "Contents of the SER" "11. Policies for internationalization" {VG}	4 (a.-h.) 7 (a.-k.)
1.3	The centrality of students in relation to learning, teaching and assessment	Part 1 § 3.2 Part 1 § 3.3	"Preparation of the Self-Evaluation Report/SER" § "Consultation within the Institution" § "Contents of the SER" "5. Strategies and modes of learning and the centrality of students" § Annexes to the SER: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 - Numbers of students</li> <li>• 6 - Number of newly enrolled students</li> <li>• 7 - Number of graduate students</li> <li>• 8 - Mean number of years to graduation</li> <li>• 9 - Percentage of student withdrawal</li> </ul>	3 (e.) 4 (e., h.) 5 (b., d., f., g., h., i.) 7 (b., d., e., g.) Annexes: 5-9
1.4	Control of all phases of students' experience: admission, progression, recognition and certification	Part 1 §2.	§ "Contents of the SER" "7. Learning and teaching: definition of study plans, their monitoring and review, appreciation of teaching staff" § Annexes to the SER: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 - Numbers of students</li> <li>• 6 - Number of newly enrolled students</li> <li>• 7 - Number of graduate students</li> <li>• 8 - Mean number of years to graduation</li> <li>• 9 - Percentage of student withdrawal</li> </ul>	5 (a., b., c., g., i.) 7 (k.) Annexes: 5-9
1.5	Modes of recruitment, professional development and appraisal for teaching staff	--	§ "Contents of the SER" "7. Learning and teaching: definition of study plans, their monitoring and review, appreciation of teaching staff" § "Contents of the SER" "8. Research and scholarship, support for the creation of research centers" {VG} § "Contents of the SER" "9. Ability to create networks" {VG} § "Contents of the SER" "11. Policies for internationalization" § Annexes to the SER: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 - Numbers of teaching staff</li> <li>• 3 - Mean age of teaching staff</li> <li>• 4 - Mean hours of teaching per week</li> </ul>	7 (h., i., j.) 8 (a., d., g.-m.) 9 (c. - f.)  Annexes: 2-4, 10 {VG}

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10 - Scientific production - Number of publications/contributions to conferences by teaching staff</li> </ul>	
<b>1.6</b>	Monitoring of didactic resources and support for students	Part 1 § 3.3	§ "Preparation of the instruments (meetings, questionnaires, focus groups...)" § "Contents of the SER" "6. Support and services for students" § "Contents of the SER" "6. Support and services for students" § "Contents of the SER" "13. Policies and modes of governance, and management of resources available (structures, staff, economic and financial resources)" § Annexes to the SER: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 11 - Economic/financial sources</li> </ul>	4 (h.) 5 (a.) 6 (a.-e.) 8 (a.-c., e.-m.) Annexes: 11
<b>1.7</b>	Information management	Part 1 § 1. Part 1 § 3. Part 1 § 3.3	§ "Preparation of the instruments (meetings, questionnaires, focus groups...)" § "Preparation of the SER" § "Contents of the SER" "2. SWOT Analysis and updating of the Strategic Plan" § "Contents of the SER" "9. Ability to create networks" {VG} § "Contents of the SER" "11. Policies for internationalization" § Annexes to the SER: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 - Faculty organigram</li> <li>• 2 - Numbers of teaching staff</li> <li>• 3 - Mean age of teaching staff</li> <li>• 4 - Mean hours of teaching per week</li> <li>• 5 - Numbers of students</li> <li>• 6 - Number of newly enrolled students</li> <li>• 7 - Number of graduate students</li> <li>• 8 - Mean number of years to graduation</li> <li>• 9 - Percentage of student withdrawal</li> <li>• 10 - Scientific production - Number of publications/contributions to conferences by teaching staff</li> <li>• 11 - Economic/financial source</li> </ul>	3 (a.- g.) 5 (a.-b., e.-i.) 11 (a.-k.) 13 (h., j.) Annexes: 1-11
<b>1.8</b>	The publication of information	Part 1 § 1.	§ "Contents of the SER" "12. Publicity and information management"	12 (a.-c.)
<b>1.9</b>	Ongoing monitoring and periodical review of programmes	Part 1 § 1. Part 1 § 3.2	§ "Contents of the SER" "4. General overview regarding programs: education, multi-disciplinary, inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary approaches" § "Contents of the SER" "7. Learning and teaching: definition of study plans, their monitoring and review, appreciation of teaching staff"	4 (a.-g.)
<b>1.10</b>	Cyclical external Quality Assurance	§ "Summary and value of the Process" Part 3 § 8.	§ "Contents of the SER" "3. Quality Assurance/QA policies" § "SER and strategic planning"	3 (a., e.)

The panel learnt from the interviews with the institutions that they actively use the guidelines of the agency when discussing the further development of their IQA. They strongly support the approach of AVEPRO to focus not only on activities of teaching and learning but include research and management and supporting the institutions with strategic management issues.

The evaluation process of AVEPRO is supposed to prompt reflection upon the mission, purposes, objectives and strategic priorities of institutions as well as upon the systems and procedures in use and their fitness to achieve the institutional mission. Institutions are also supposed to reflect what type of measures they have implemented, including feedback from students, staff, employers and other stakeholders, not to mention the procedures for strategic planning, including the capacity to change and meet new challenges. (SAR p.52)

The review panel also carefully reviewed the published reports that are available on the website of the agency in order to assess to which extent the reflection of ESG part I is visible in the outcomes of the evaluation procedures of AVEPRO.

### **Analysis**

AVEPRO operates in a complex field of ecclesiastical academic institutions that are based all around the world and embedded in various academic cultures and international higher education systems. Consequently, the working methodology of AVEPRO is required to be flexible, applicable in different contexts and with different scopes. In light of this required flexibility the panel recognizes that AVEPRO has updated its guidelines in order to reflect first experiences of the agency, but also to strengthen the link towards the ESG 2015. The panel believes that this happened with great sensitivity and without developing an overly Eurocentric or prescriptive approach.

The panel scrutinized the methodology and guidelines for AVEPRO's activities and confirms that they reflect internal quality assurance as understood in ESG Part I. The alignment table presented by AVEPRO was carefully reviewed and the respective underlying documents were analysed. The panel particularly acknowledges that these guidelines address institutional evaluation in a broader context and consider much more than teaching and learning activities. Consequently, the level of explicit reflection must be seen in this context. Besides the alignment tables, the panel also considers the interviews with evaluators, who reflected on the ESG orientation of the review, and also the statements of university representatives who explained that they explicitly worked with the ESG in preparing for the review. When carefully considering the available self-evaluation reports of institutions, as part of the site visit, it became obvious that ESG part one is adequately reflected in the documents produced by the institutions.

Special recognition should be given to the agency for its approach of not focusing on a criterion centered approach in its promotion and evaluation, but instead clearly focus on the promotion of a quality culture that is dialogue oriented, involves feedback of different stakeholders including students, and treats the institution in its context and reflecting its mission. Without neglecting the required reflection of ESG part one, the evaluation approach of AVEPRO supports the institutions in defining their own strategic management priorities.

The appropriateness of the agency's approach is also confirmed by the different presentations and re-confirmations of trust in the work of the agency and the reflection that the procedure and cooperation with AVEPRO was an added value for institutions in the interviews during the site visit.

While the methodology and the guidelines reflect ESG part I, it did not skip the attention of the reviewers that the published reports do not explicitly refer to the ESG part I. After careful consideration and reviewing the guidelines, the guidelines for self-evaluation, and the guidelines for reviewers, the panel concludes that this poor reflection shall not be considered under ESG 2.1, but will be discussed under ESG 2.4 and 2.5. This is particularly in light of the fact that AVEPRO needs to balance the global scale of its activity in its methodology. Defined by its mission, AVEPRO very much relies on soft power and has to avoid an overly Eurocentric focus and swell as image, that might not be welcome in other parts of the world. At the same time, AVEPRO manages to reflect ESG part I in its requirements. The panel believes that this different style and relationship with institutions is already reflected by avoiding the name of evaluation *standards*, and instead of pointing at evaluation *guidelines*.

### **Panel commendation:**

The panel commends AVEPRO for the handling the unique challenge of doing justice to the requirements of the European Higher Education Areas while also considering the different needs of other regions across the globe.

The panel commends AVEPRO for its approach of not focusing on a criterion centred approach in its promotion and evaluation, but instead clearly focus on the promotion of a quality culture that is dialogue oriented, involves feedback of different stakeholders including students, and treats the institution in its context and reflecting its mission.

**Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

## ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE

Standard:

External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.

### Evidence

Already in the key document “Nature, context, purpose, standards and procedures of quality evaluation and promotion (Guidelines A)”, AVEPRO explains that the “the main aim of the Agency’s Guidelines is to ensure a common and unitary orientation for all ecclesiastical academic institutions both in Europe and in other continents, while maintaining a level of general applicability sufficient to respect the diversities and characteristics of the individual institutions in their own specific contexts.”

The SAR (p. 54) describes that AVEPRO adopts a single approach which is aimed at bringing together and harmonizing different three different elements:

- The Apostolic constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* (2017). Each ecclesiastical academic Institution should, through mission statements, strategic plans and other authoritative declarations, define its objectives and profiles as well as the means and policies through which they intend to realise them.
- The ESG 2015 as a key reference framework.
- The Statutes of the ecclesiastical academic Institutions, which are built on the individual characteristics of institutions and – in particular cases – on the specific mission of a religious order, and which account for the country-specific legal bases and diverse cultural features. (SAR p.54)

When explaining the context of its work in the above listed document (Guideline A), AVEPRO outlines that “the agency needs to support the ecclesiastical institutions to ensure that they achieve an appropriate position in the world of Higher Education via the development of an efficient and coherent process of quality promotion that is based on constant improvement, supports a culture of quality in all activities, and meets the international or regional standards and guidelines”

As described in the SAR (p.55), the guidelines provided by AVEPRO to the ecclesiastical academic institutions are updated regularly with the support of key stakeholders (internal, e.g. Faculties, students; external, e.g. the CCE, the Episcopal Conferences) and are publicly available. The panel also received confirmation during the interviews with CCE and higher education institutions that these documents and procedures were discussed with them prior to the document’s treatment in the Board of AVEPRO, where again different stakeholders are represented. As these are published documents, all ecclesiastical academic institutions can access them and use them in autonomy when preparing for the QA evaluation process.

AVEPRO’s external evaluation reports do not have any formal consequences and intend to support the institutions in their internal development. A follow-up phase is realised within twelve months after the site visit: the institution is asked to produce its Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) and its Strategic Plan. The panel learnt during the interviews with the agency management as well as institutions that these plans are

not again subject to an evaluation by AVEPRO, yet they are taken into consideration by the CCE and the related Grand Chancellors.

### **Analysis**

Recognizing the intention of the work that AVEPRO carries out to support ecclesiastical academic institutions in developing a culture of quality and strengthening their capacity towards strategic management and decision taking, it seems very reasonable to operate on the level of promotion and evaluation at the same time, which is exactly what the agency puts into practice. Having developed a flexible methodology that is applicable in different cultural contexts and allows the agency to respect institutional autonomy, AVEPRO deals well with the challenge of not overburdening institutions with their evaluation activities, as the promotional part of the work underlines the added value of undergoing an evaluation.

By focusing the evaluation not only on teaching and learning, institutions are approached “holistically”, in their different dimensions including research, teaching, and also management. The guidelines for self-evaluation are drawn in such a way that they are applicable in different contexts and also clearly support institutions in improving their own quality. This approach is also supported by the fact that there are no immediate legal consequences resulting from the evaluation, and thus it enables the institutions to openly discuss potential challenges with the evaluators.

The review panel learnt during the interviews with institutions that the results of the evaluation, namely the final evaluation report that is also published, are perceived to be very helpful for the institutions, as they carefully reflect what was discussed, with a strong focus on status quo and developmental options. The panel also learnt that in the case of the evaluation of Spanish institutions, the reports were discussed amongst the institutions and when going beyond the individual case, institutions recognized that some inconsistencies in the evaluation and the application of the methodology became visible. The panel believes that this is an indicator to further look into the issue of consistency, which will happen under ESG 2.5.

To conclude, the panel believes that AVEPRO has found a very sound approach to act as a facilitator for quality in the higher education system of the Holy See and the implemented methodology and a valuation approach achieve the defined purpose in a very effective way. The panel furthermore is convinced that the full impact of *Veritatis Gaudium* is not yet visible and in light of the vision of the document, continuing its implementation will also require AVEPRO to continuously update and develop its methodology, including new and different stakeholders in the review process. Recognizing the progress that is already achieved based on *Veritatis Gaudium*, the panel is very optimistic that the engaged actors have all the knowledge and capacity to continue on this path. The current resource situation might be a limiting factor though.

### **Suggestion for further improvement:**

The panel suggests that AVEPRO soon revises its current methodology (including selection and composition of review panels as well as criteria and guidelines) in order to support the transformative agenda of *Veritatis Gaudium* even better.

### **Panel conclusion: fully compliant**

## ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES

Standard:

External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include:

- a self-assessment or equivalent
- an external assessment normally including a site visit
- a report resulting from the external assessment
- a consistent follow-up



## **Evidence**

The guidelines of AVEPRO (Guideline A,B,C,D,E) outline all the different steps of the evaluation process . Based on these documents, the process can be described as follows: The institution prepares a Self-Evaluation Report/SER using AVEPRO guidelines for self-evaluation. In a next step, AVEPRO appoints a group of international experts (Evaluation Commission) to analyse the SER. The panel learnt during the interviews with the management of the agency that it is the President who officially makes the appointment. In the next step the appointed panel visits the institution (site visit) and interviews different stakeholders. During the site visit to AVEPRO the panel also reviewed some exemplary site visit schedules.

Following the visit to the institutions the panel writes a report, which later on - together with possible addenda or comments made by the institution - is also fully published (external evaluation report). As expected by the AVEPRO guidelines, the external evaluation report explains the institutional quality promotion policies and make recommendations for improvements. The report should also include remarks upon the validity and precision of the SER, come up with proposals for the institution's development, and provide recommendations for further actions.

Based on the report, the institution is expected to prepare a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). The SAR (p.56) explains that AVEPRO will support the institution in the phase of monitoring and implementation of the plan. As a further step, the institution draws up a strategic plan based on the guidelines proposed by AVEPRO. The SAR (p.56) also explains that the strategic plan must be monitored on a regular basis by the institution itself without further involvement of AVEPRO.

## **Analysis**

The panel carefully studied the available guidelines that explain the evaluation process from the beginning, from the perspective of an institution (Guidelines B), and which cover the process of external evaluation (Guidelines C) right through to the process of drafting of the strategic plan (Guidelines D). Also, the panel discussed with rectors of institutions their perception of the implementation and, in addition, addressed the same experience with evaluators. The panel also made sure that evaluators compared their experiences during the interview, in order to identify potential inconsistencies in the implementation process. Based upon the interviews, the panel concludes that there is large consistency when it comes to the process in terms of using the guidelines for self-evaluation, as well as the implementation of the site visit. Minor differences during the site visits and report writing are apparently caused by the diversity of approaches in the expert panels (see ESG 2.4).

An area that will still require attention is the consistency of the follow-up procedure. While the agency explains that it supports the institution during the improvement phase, institutions themselves described that they would wish for a coordinated follow-up. Also some institutions reported during the interviews that they are not even aware of any follow-up, hence the panel believes that due to the informality of many internal procedures in the agency it might very well happen, that experiences differ as, in some cases, support might have been requested and in others that might not have been the case. In addition, by the very nature of the character of a quality assurance agency, the direct support that can be provided from an agency to an institution as they seek to address the points that were raised in the Agency's report is limited, owing both to resource and impartiality. Consequently, the panel believes that AVEPRO should define a follow-up procedure and embed it equally well in its guidelines. A structured feedback on the QIP would probably help institutions and provide more formalized guidance.

## **Panel recommendations**

AVEPRO should implement a consistent follow-up procedure.

## **Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**

## ESG 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS

Standard:

External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).

### 2014 review recommendation

The Panel welcomes the participation of student members within the teams but encourages AVEPRO for greater effort to bring cohesion to the involvement of students in the processes of the Agency and in Quality Assurance matters on the ground within the ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties.

### Evidence

AVEPRO explains in its SAR (p.57) that it has set up a database of potential and active evaluators. To be considered to become an evaluator, external experts can either send in an unsolicited application or be indicated by the Board of Directors and/or the Scientific Council or be indicated by a Higher Education Institution or QA body. Currently, the database consists of approximately 350 experts (SAR p.57). They are appointed for a five-year term by the President of the Agency, based on the strength of their scientific competence as well as academic and ecclesial experience. Out of this database experts are selected for single evaluations. One specific feature of AVEPRO evaluators is the fact that the experts in the external evaluation commissions are not paid by AVEPRO and take part in the evaluation process in light of the values of the Church itself. (SAR p.57).

AVEPRO points out that multilingualism is one of the most significant challenges that the agency faces also in terms of evaluators. Evaluation Commissions are necessarily composed of experts from different countries who need to read and communicate using a common working language, though respecting and valuing the languages spoken in the involved countries. To date, the experts in the AVEPRO's database come from over 20 countries, covering approximately 10 languages. (SAR p.57)

The general criteria for expert selection are defined in Article 11 of the Statutes of the agency. The SAR lists a more specific set of criteria for setting up expert panels, among which are knowledge in Quality Assurance; scientific knowledge in the main field of the Faculty; being a student representative; residency in the country in which the evaluation will take place. (SAR p.57). At the same place AVEPRO also explains the process of panel appointing including a check against potential conflict of interest through the Director. In order to prepare experts for their task, AVEPRO outlines three means of training: a) ad hoc seminars, (b) AVEPRO's Guidelines, and (c) e-learning training programme for external evaluators.

AVEPRO also explains that whenever possible and appropriate, students who live in the area of the academic institution under review will be appointed to the panel in order to assure the student is fully aware of the main characteristics and challenges in the region and, at the same time, reducing the costs of the evaluation. (SAR p.57)

The panel learnt during interviews with the management that currently a training module for evaluators is under development. Also, members of the Scientific Council explained that they believe that reviewers training is an area of development for AVEPRO, particularly with regards to report writing.

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of existing training approaches, the expert panel also carefully reviewed numerous evaluation reports from different evaluation commissions, in order to compare extent, style, structure and implementation of existing AVEPRO guidelines.

### Analysis

Due to the diversity of the ecclesiastical institutions under the umbrella of AVEPRO in terms of languages, culture, structure, and national higher education systems, the agency is particularly challenged in building up an appropriate pool of potential evaluators. As the existing database of 350 experts shows, AVEPRO

has succeeded in creating a pool with a focus on quality reviewers instead of broadening for the sake of quantity. The panel believes that the chosen approach of building and creating networks in order to facilitate the acquisition of new experts is more than adequate. This was also confirmed during the interviews with institutions who underwent a review, as they perceived the experts as qualified, fair and willing to understand the institution. The panel recognizes the self-assessment of AVEPRO reflecting on the importance of knowledge of the respective higher education system in the evaluation commission to remain an area of required training for experts and supports this initiative. At the same time, the panel recognized that when considering panel composition, the SAR explains that at least one expert should have this knowledge (selection criteria) and that the interviewed institutions showed no concern in this regard. Consequently, the panel concludes that the experts have the required skills to perform a site visit and make an assessment.

The panel positively recognizes that it is standard procedure for AVEPRO to involve a student member in the external evaluation commissions and during the interviews with the external experts the panel learnt that the participation of the students was relatively equal and appreciated by all parties involved.

The panel was assured during the interviews that it is the role of the President of the agency to select appropriate evaluators from the database or recruit new experts. At the same time the director is in charge of identifying and excluding any potential conflict of interest and he also officially appoints the external evaluation committee. To that end, he confirms the panel he himself has selected.

Indeed, the practiced rules and criteria that are outlined in the SAR reflect a practice that is in line with European standards and up-to-date. However, the panel was unable to identify any predefined guidelines for the panel composition. While the Statutes provide some very general guidelines, and the “Guidelines C” provide some “Characteristics of the Evaluation Team” in which the student member is explicitly recognized, the panel believes that agreeing on predefined selection criteria in a central document will help to further professionalize expert appointment. In this context it might also be considered to divide expert selection from official panel appointment as means of internal quality assurance and division of responsibility. A helpful instrument in this regard could also be a technical committee as explained under ESG 2.5.

Another area that obviously needs development is the training of experts. Based on the opinion of the expert panel, there are two areas where expert training needs are most obvious. In the current system, the report prepared by the external evaluation commission is the final outcome of the procedure, and no other body or committee reviews the reports or takes any formal decision assuring consistency of the assessment. Consequently, additional effort has to be invested in the training of experts regarding the understanding of the guidelines in order to increase the consistent application of the guidelines.

The second area of required expert training became obvious when carefully analysing some final evaluation reports published on the website of the agency. In line with the opinion voiced by some members of the Scientific Council, report writing should be further explained to the experts. The introduction of a predefined structure in the form of a template apparently succeeded in standardizing the headlines and thus increasing comparability. However, the panel does not agree with the line of argumentation of the agency, that any reviewer with a high academic reputation is also capable of writing a review report that meets the requirement of the external reader. The panel found examples of reports that were not very comprehensible for external readers, partners and other interested individuals. This is not understood as a weakness of the outcome or the drawing of conclusions, as it seemed that the institutions which were part of the review felt (mostly) the reports to be adequate, but an outside reader would be unable to follow the proposed recommendations and understand its reasoning. Particularly the non-publication of the institutional self evaluation report raises the requirements towards the final evaluation report in terms of comprehensiveness as an interested reader is unable to research the basis of the assessment. The panel believes that additional expert training is required to further improve the comprehensibility of the reports. (See also ESG 2.6)

## Panel commendation

The panel commends AVEPRO on the ingenuous and differentiated use of higher education experts from all around the world far beyond their engagement in the review process as such.

## Panel recommendations

AVEPRO should define its expert nomination criteria and improve the nomination process of the external evaluation procedures.

AVEPRO should increase and ensure a consistent and comprehensive programme of training for experts.

## Panel conclusion: substantially compliant

## ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES

Standard:

Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.

## Evidence

The SAR outlines that the key documents towards consistency are the AVEPRO guidelines as all ecclesiastical academic institutions and all the members of external evaluation commissions have to refer to them in their self-evaluation process as well as during the evaluations. (SAR p.59) In order to ensure a common understanding of how to use the guidelines and the criteria contained therein, the Agency has been implementing a set of information and training measures targeting the staff of ecclesiastical academic Institutions as well experts who are part of the external evaluation commissions. The SAR specifically lists two examples of a series of meetings in Spain and in Poland, both regions where a number of evaluations took place. (SAR p.59)

Since the last ENQA review, AVEPRO has introduced an “interpretation grid” in its guidelines for the evaluation commissions to facilitate the analysis of the institution’s SER. (SAR p.66)

When considering criteria for outcomes, it is important to recognize that AVEPRO’s evaluation process does not lead to formal decisions (e.g. accreditation). The commission’s recommendations are communicated to the HEI which is supposed to take them into account in drawing up its own QIP as well as later on its strategic plan. In a further step, as explained earlier the reports are published and also sent to the CCE, which will consider them when taking the decision about accreditation of an institution.

In its SAR, AVEPRO also outlines that an institution can “fail” a review when it becomes clear to the external evaluation commission that the information provided in the self-evaluation report is distant from reality, or if the institution’s means or choices are in contrast with the mission it should fulfil. (SAR p. 60)

During the on-site interviews, the panel also learnt that AVEPRO made a proposal implying that at least one panel member would take part in several reviews. In this way, such a person would be able to ensure the adoption of a homogenous approach in evaluation and a similar style in reporting. This solution was proposed to the Spanish Episcopal Conference for the evaluation of the Higher Institutes of Religious Studies (HIRS) located in Spain, planned to start from the Academic year 2020-2021 (interview with AVEPRO management). In a later interview, the panel was informed that in the reviews of Spanish HEIs, the institutions themselves discovered that different panels applied AVEPROs guidelines differently when they read the reports about other institutions.

## Analysis

When considering ESG 2.5, the key question for the panel is the definition of what the outcome of the work of AVEPRO'S evaluation process is. As there is no decision taken by the agency, and any potential decisions the evaluation process might impact are taken independently by other organizations such as CCE, the product and the outcome of the evaluation process is the report of the external evaluation committee. It is the responsibility of AVEPRO to assure that the evaluation committees' judgements are based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently.

The panel believes that in a very positive way AVEPRO manages to concentrate most relevant aspects regarding the evaluation process in a small set of guidelines, that are all publicly available and do not only explain the technicalities of the different steps of the procedures for the institutions as well as the evaluators, they also provide templates and pre-structure the required documents in order to support all actors aiming at consistency. As explained earlier, the panel believes that these are helpful instruments to achieve consistency in the application of tools and in procedures.

However, when it comes to the consistency of the judgments and the outcome, the panel believes that any activities prior to the evaluation will have limited impact on ensuring consistency of the outcome, namely the reports. As explained earlier, clearly an improved training of external evaluators can contribute to improve the quality of the reports. Also, the introduction of the interpretation grid was a valuable step towards more consistency. Nonetheless, the panel is convinced that no ex-ante activity can assure consistency of reports written by different panels in different institutions. This will require ex-post activity. In a best case this activity deals with a draft of the report and can put it in context with other evaluations and comment on issues of consistent application of the guidelines. One solution could be the implementation of a "technical committee" that is charged with the scrutinization of reports, commenting on aspects of comprehensibility and consistency. Such an additional loop would also allow the improvement of the reports in case where the evidence for some of the proposed recommendation is lacking or the explanation of the panel is not comprehensible for an external reader. In order to assure independence, this task should not be led on the shoulders of existing staff of the agency, as it requires a certain level of distance from the reviewer's as well as institutions. Such a committee could also be tasked with the official nomination of experts based on a proposal of the director in order to create an internal system of checks and balances and strengthen the position of evaluators.

### Panel recommendations

AVEPRO should implement a technical committee assuring consistency and evidence-based recommendations in the reports.

### Panel conclusion: substantially compliant

## ESG 2.6 REPORTING

Standard:

Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.

### 2014 review recommendation

AVEPRO should reinforce requirements towards different review panels so that they fully follow the Agency's guidance in all aspects of external reviews, in particular adhering to the single standard report form developed. The Agency may also be willing to learn from ENQA EQArep project on best practice in publishing reports and to adjust its performance accordingly.

## **Evidence**

AVEPRO explains that it understands the external evaluation report as the most visible result of the whole evaluation process, as it is fully published on the AVEPRO website. The report shall recognise the importance of institutional enhancement policies and contain recommendations for improvement. Following the explanations in the SAR, the evaluation commission is required to write the report in a clear and easy-to-read style, since it also has a dissemination purpose addressing the public of non-experts. (SAR p. 61)

Aiming at increasing comparability, evaluation commissions are supported with a template of the final report to be used when writing up the Report by AVEPRO. This template defines a proposed structure of the evaluation report. (Guidelines C)

As the guidelines of AVEPRO foresee (Guidelines C) the president of the evaluation commission is in charge of composing the report and sends the final draft of the report to the institution, which has two weeks' time to respond; if no response is provided within this time, the institution is considered to consent. If the institution returns the report with corrections of errors or specific statements on factual issues, these amendments will be part of the final report that is published.

AVEPRO tends to accept final reports in all seven official languages of the Holy See, while the use of English and/or Italian is required whenever reasonably possible. (SAR p. 61) (interview with agency management)

Additional evidence for this standard was also accessed on the website of AVEPRO, where the full evaluation reports are published. The review panel carefully reviewed a number of them in consideration of the fact that these are the final outcomes of the evaluation procedure.

## **Analysis**

The panel positively recognizes that all evaluation reports produced by AVEPRO are published on the website. All stakeholders involved are aware of the fact that all outcomes are published, and fully accessible on the website. The panel found confirmation of that awareness in the discussions with institutions, who outlined that besides their interest in improvement, they also feel that the broader public can read about the performance of their institution on the Internet, hence creating some additional motivation to perform well in the evaluation.

The panel also recognized that based on internal self-assessment, AVEPRO has identified comparability and consistency of reports as an area of improvement and decided to introduce a template for the use of external valuers. The panel can positively confirm that in the more recent external evaluation reports this structure could be identified showing a first success of the implemented improvement steps. The panel is also aware of the multiple academic styles and approaches towards report writing depending on disciplines, and geographical area where the evaluators come from. Defining a unified approach, while leaving the report writing solely and centrally in the hands of the independent evaluators consequently creates an extra challenge.

However, when carefully analysing a number of published reports the panel recognized that there is still a remarkable diversity in the intensity of description and comprehensibility of the reports. Even though the template is used, and the structure is comparable in the newer reports, the reports feature a very different level of detail. Some reports provide a rough idea about the process of the review while others do not provide this information at all. While all reports more or less defined the context of the institution and explain its situation, a weakness in all reports that were assessed by the panel is, that it is impossible to separate between the evidence that was seen, the analysis of the panel and the conclusion that is drawn. Reports mix all this in one, and in most of the cases do not provide the evidence for their findings in detail. In particular, since the self-evaluation reports of the institutions are not published, the panel would expect a higher level of evidence to be featured in the reports, so that the external reader can understand the recommendations of the panel. This is particularly important in light of the statement of AVEPRO that the reports also have a dissemination purpose for the non-academic public. The panel is convinced that the reports require further improvement in the field of comprehensibility and evidence-basing.

This conclusion also stands when recognizing the diversity in the ecclesiastical higher education system AVEPRO works in. It is particularly the evaluation reports that might create comparability beyond differences in institutions. The need for comparable reporting standards became even more obvious when assessing numerous institutions in the same area as it happened in for example Spain. The fact that even institutions expressed that there are differences in qualities of the reports, supports the finding of the panel.

Another critical reflection must be given when considering the extent to which the published reports reflect on the requirements based on the ESG part one. While recognizing that AVEPRO provides guidelines for self evaluation that generally reflect ESG part I, it is obvious, that the final evaluation reports barely allow to identify this reflection. In this regard it has to be said, that the focus of the evaluation is the whole institution, and that the focus is not only on teaching and learning, but on a much more holistic understanding of the institution. However when looking at the published reports, examples of reflection of ESG part I can only be found when adopting a very generic understanding of e.g. teaching and learning assessment. In most reports it was hard to identify how the standards of ESG part I are reflected. Once again, the panel understands that diversity of the ecclesiastical academic community with different approaches requires different levels of reflection. However, it can be expected that reports are comparable in the intensity of their reflection. At the same time, when considering e.g. teaching and learning related aspects, major keywords coming from ESG part I should be reflected more explicitly.

Already in the 2014 ENQA review the panel critically reflected on the final evaluation reports. While it is obvious that the issue is still pending, the panel recognizes that AVEPRO has defined new guidelines only in 2018 which so far could have impacted only a small number of final reports, which reduces the availability of evidence in this field. Consequently, the panel encourages the agency to follow up on this issue as AVEPRO rightfully pointed out that these reports are the final visible outcome of its activities.

### **Panel recommendations**

AVEPRO should take steps to further improve comprehensibility of its reports that clearly follow the template it provides.

AVEPRO should take steps to assure a stronger visibility of the reflection of ESG part one in its evaluation reports.

### **Panel conclusion: partially compliant**

## ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

Standard:

Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.

### **Evidence**

As described above, the institutional evaluation of AVEPRO does not produce any formal consequences or lead to a decision. Nevertheless, the guidelines of AVEPRO (Guideline C) have defined an appeals procedure. It is explained that “should the Institution find what it deems are serious and grounded reasons for a revision of the Report, it can appeal directly to AVEPRO. The Institution must send a formal request for the publication of the Report to be postponed, stating the reason for its appeal in detail. Once AVEPRO has received such formal request, it postpones publication of the Report and submits the question to the Agency’s Scientific Council, which has two options: it can accept the appeal and suggest possible solutions to resolve the issue (e.g. the appointment of a new Evaluation Commission, or the rewriting of all or part of the Report).” The Scientific Council can also reject the appeal if it deems that the objections made were unfounded/groundless.

AVEPRO has so far carried out 128 evaluations and there have been no situations of conflict to end up in appeal. (SAR p. 62).

Besides the appeal option there is no specific policy regarding complaints. In this context AVEPRO outlines that the aim of the procedure is to foster dialogue and interaction between the agency and the institution, according to the common aim of the ongoing enhancement of quality in the Holy See's Higher Education system. (SAR p. 62) The panel has learnt during the interviews with institutions as well as AVEPRO management that indeed there is a constant exchange between agency and institutions already in preparation of the evaluation. It was explained to the panel that as part of this exchange any potential concern could be addressed and handled to the satisfaction of all parties involved.

### **Analysis**

The panel believes that with regards to appeals there is a clearly defined way in which institutions can appeal against what indeed is the final outcome of the procedure, namely the evaluation report. The panel believes that the Scientific Council as a body that is not involved in everyday operations is the right institution to consider appeals. The fact that even after 128 implemented procedures not a single appeal was received, speaks for the fact that there is an intensive exchange between agency and institution, that already early on reduces any misunderstanding that could lead to an appeal. On the other hand it also speaks for the good perception of the outcomes of the evaluation of the experts by the institutions. This was also confirmed with high consistency during the interviews with institutions. A slight concern should be raised in this regard recognizing that the Scientific Council has not met for three years between 2016 and 2018 as described earlier. This might also have an implicit impact on the readiness of an institution to take the chance of an appeal, knowing that it is not known when the respective appeals body meets the next time. The panel believes that this interpretation at this time clearly is of low relevance, but should be considered when making better use of the capacities of the Scientific Council in the future as explained under ESG 3.5.

Considering complaints, it has to be stated that at this point there is no explicit procedure for this. However, the openness of communication between agency, institutions, and other stakeholders is one of the key characteristics of the work of AVEPRO and during the interviews the panel needed to explain quite intensively what the panel meant with a complaints policy, as institutions, evaluators and also agency staff and management very consistently explained that within the intense exchange between all parties involved any reason for complaints can be addressed directly. The panel particularly addressed the issue with institutions and is convinced that the institutions feel that they can make their point whenever they are unhappy with any of the proceedings during the evaluation process. Consequently, the panel concludes that the way to deal with complaints is very sound for the academic system the agency works in and in line with the current scope of its activities.

While presently the soundness of the complaints approach is the strongest argument in this context when compared to the lack of formalization, a quick thought should be given to potential future developments. The panel learnt in interviews with the management of the agency that in order to reduce the burden for institutions, the agency aims at cooperating with national accreditation agencies whenever possible and align their procedures. This might lead to a recognition of the outcome of AVEPRO procedures in light of a national accreditation. Naturally, this puts different pressure on an institution and it so might change the importance institutions give to a well-defined and formalized complaints procedure. Consequently, AVEPRO is encouraged to also formalize such a procedure as part of the continuous professionalization of their activities.

### **Panel recommendations**

AVEPRO should formalize their complaints procedures.

**Panel conclusion: substantially compliant**



## ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

Overall, the panel found an agency in a state of transition, in particular with regard to the system-wide global transformation process incited by the *Veritatis Gaudium*, the agency's new mandate and a now global remit. The agency is becoming more mature, known and accepted, with more opportunities and activities arising, contributing to a very dynamic and complex environment. On part of the agency, this requires a lot of flexibility and leads to a constantly changing roadmap. Accordingly, the panel found a culture and operations very much benefitting from a shared sense of mission and good will. And this high level of spirit and dedication is pivotal, as the agency is not only currently itself undergoing a massive transformation by taking its operations global but is also tasked with helping the transformative agenda of the *Veritatis Gaudium* to full fruition. This is a huge endeavour, posing all kinds of challenges, among them conceptual, operational, resource-related, methodological, political and social ones.

The panel also understands, that right now almost everything needs to be kept flexible because of the dynamic changes and the complex environment. On the other hand, as for now available resources and external factors basically dictate the working plan, instead of the other way round; this makes any planning difficult and almost impossible to assess if AVEPRO is capable of achieving its own goals in the long run. There is also always the danger of overload, as has been mentioned under ESG 3.5. It is yet unclear what will happen if the number of evaluations and re-evaluations grow at the same time. The panel thus encourages AVEPRO to consider this in the next strategic plan and also develop a longer-term working plan along its key priorities, with precise activities, clear targets and deadlines, which will also make it easier to assess the actual resource gap. In the same vein, the panel also finds that the agency would benefit from assessing its current governance and organisational structure and find ways of making even better use of the experts they can draw upon.

In addition, *Veritatis Gaudium* will require AVEPRO to rethink its operations in a major way: not only the guidelines and criteria, but also the composition of review commissions and the composition and function of the agency's advisory bodies probably need to be adjusted. The panel thus wants to raise awareness that this is a great opportunity for AVEPRO as the agency would not only help institutions making sense of the new constitution but also do pioneering work within the field of external QA internationally. But it will also bind a lot of time, effort and mental capacity and should thus be made a high priority and again linked to resource planning. In this, however, AVEPRO's focus on dialogue, and building relationships will help this cause and promote the quality of all operations within the higher education system of the Holy See. In a way, the agency is trying to live up to the fundamental criteria stated in the *Veritatis Gaudium* itself and the panel wants to commend the agency on its impressive achievements within one of the largest education reform attempts worldwide.

## CONCLUSION

The panel found AVEPRO in full compliance with the ESG in seven out of 14 standards reflecting AVEPRO's clear orientation towards the implementation of the European perspective of QA particularly in its structures. In five out of 14 standards the panel found AVEPRO to be substantially compliant with the ESG, while two standards that were assessed only partially compliant are 3.5 Resources and 2.6 Reporting. The summary of the compliance assessment by the panel looks as follows:

- Fully compliant for the following ESGs – 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.7, 2.1, and 2.2
- Substantially compliant in the following ESGs – 3.6, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, and 2.7
- Partially compliant: 3.5 and 2.6

## SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS

### ESG 3.1

The panel commends AVEPRO for the good exchange with and involvement of a great array of stakeholders.

The panel commends AVEPRO for the related trust institutions and stakeholders have in their work.

### ESG 3.6

The panel applauds AVEPRO's approach of constant stakeholder dialogue as a means for keeping the agency relevant and reflexive.

### ESG 2.1

The panel commends AVEPRO for the handling the unique challenge of doing justice to the requirements of the European Higher Education Areas while also considering the different needs of other regions across the globe.

The panel commends AVEPRO for its approach of not focusing on a criterion centered approach in its promotion and evaluation, but instead clearly focus on the promotion of a quality culture that is dialogue oriented, involves feedback of different stakeholders including students, and treats the institution in its context and reflecting its mission.

### ESG 2.4

The panel commends AVEPRO on the ingenious and differentiated use of higher education experts from all around the world far beyond their engagement in the review process as such.

## OVERVIEW OF JUDGEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**ESG 3.1 - fully compliant**

**ESG 3.2 - fully compliant**

**ESG 3.3 - fully compliant**

**ESG 3.4 - fully compliant**

**ESG 3.5 - partially compliant**

AVEPRO should define a work plan and connect required resources to it in order to balance and plan activities and required resources. This will help to specify the realistic need of additionally required resources.

AVEPRO should better use the potential of the Scientific Council, define a meeting interval and adhere to it.

**ESG 3.6 - substantially compliant**

AVEPRO should take a more systematic and formalized approach in its IQA efforts.

**ESG 3.7 - fully compliant**

**ESG 2.1 - fully compliant**

**ESG 2.2 - fully compliant**

**ESG 2.3 -substantially compliant**

AVEPRO should implement a consistent follow-up procedure.

**ESG 2.4 - substantially compliant**

AVEPRO should define its expert nomination criteria and improve the nomination process of the external evaluation procedures.

AVEPRO should increase and ensure a consistent and comprehensive programme of training for experts.

**ESG 2.5 - substantially compliant**

AVEPRO should implement a technical committee assuring consistency and evidence-based recommendations in the reports.

**ESG 2.6 - partially compliant**

AVEPRO should take steps to further improve comprehensibility of its reports that clearly follow the template it provides.

AVEPRO should take steps to assure a stronger visibility of the reflection of ESG part one in its evaluation reports.

**ESG 2.7 - substantially compliant**

AVEPRO should formalize their complaints procedures.

In light of the documentary and oral evidence considered by it, the review panel is satisfied that, in the performance of its functions, AVEPRO is in compliance with the ESG.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

**ESG 3.5 Thematic analysis**

The panel encourages AVEPRO to share wider and more easily accessible the lessons that can be drawn from operating on a truly international level also to the international QA community.

**ESG 3.5 Resources**

The panel advises AVEPRO to assess its current governance and organisational structure (e.g. two boards with potentially overlapping duties) in order to make even better use of the expert knowledge the agency can draw upon.

**ESG 2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose**

The panel suggests that AVEPRO soon revises its current methodology (including selection and composition of review panels as well as criteria and guidelines) in order to support the transformative agenda of Veritatis Gaudium even better.

# ANNEXES

## ANNEX I: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

PREPARATORY DAY → Tuesday December 3rd 2019			
Timing	topic	Persons for interview	Issues to be discussed
14:30 – 15:30 60 min	Panel preparatory meeting - <b>Kapitelsaal Pontificio Collegio Teutonico</b> Via della Sagrestia 17, Città del Vaticano	--	Review panel meeting
16:00 – 17:15 75 min	Meeting on the Holy See HE System - <b>Aula del Consiglio Augustinian Patristic Institute</b> , Via Paolo VI, 25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• P. Andrzej WODKA C.SS.R., President</li> <li>• Riccardo CINQUEGRANI, Director</li> </ul>	Presentation of the Holy See HE System
17.15 – 17.30 15 min	Transfer to the <b>Pontificio Collegio Teutonico</b>	--	--
17:30 – 19:30 120 min	Panel private discussion - <b>Pontificio Collegio Teutonico</b>	--	--
19:45	Panel dinner - <b>Domus Sanctae Marthae</b>	--	--

DAY I → , Wednesday December 4th 2019			
Timing	topic	Persons for interview	Issues to be discussed
8.30 – 9.00 30 min	<b>AVEPRO's offices</b> Via della Conciliazione 5 Welcome, acquaintance with physical infrastructure	--	Quick tour of AVEPRO facilities, settling in
09.00 – 10.00 60 min	Meeting with AVEPRO leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• P. Andrzej WODKA C.SS.R., President</li> <li>• Riccardo CINQUEGRANI, Director</li> </ul>	
15 min	Panel private discussion	--	--
10.15 – 11.15 60 min	Meeting with AVEPRO staff for evaluations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Samanta BONGINI</li> <li>• Valerio NAPOLEONI</li> <li>• Elisa MANCINELLI</li> <li>• Piero TOSI</li> </ul>	
11.15 – 11.30 15 min	Panel private discussion	--	--

11.30 – 12.20 50 min	Meeting with AVEPRO Board of Directors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fr. Friedrich BECHINA FSO, Under Secretary of the Congregation for Catholic Education/CCE</li> <li>• Sjur BERGAN, Head of Education Department at the Council of Europe</li> <li>• Achim HOPBACH, Director of Austrian Quality Assurance Agency/AQ Austria</li> <li>• Msgr. Guy-Réal THIVIERGE, Secretary General of the <i>Gravissimum Educationis</i> Foundation</li> </ul>	
12.25 – 12.45 20 min	Transfer to the Secretariat of State	--	--
12.45 – 13.15 30 min	Meeting with the Secretariat of State – <b>Secretariat of State building</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Msgr. Mirosław S. WACHOWSKI, Under-Secretary for Relations with States</li> </ul>	Overview of the role of the Agency in the framework of the foreign affairs of the Holy See
13.15 – 13.30 15 min	Transfer back to AVEPRO's offices	--	--
13.30 – 14.15 45 min	<b>AVEPRO's offices</b> Lunch	--	Panel meeting in private
14.15 - 15.15 60 min	Meeting with Rectors, Pro-Rectors and Deans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rev. Mauro MANTOVANI SBD, Rector of the Pontifical Salesian University/UPS (Rome) and President of the Conference of the Rectors of the Pontifical Universities and Institutions (Conferenza dei Rettori delle Università e Istituzioni Pontificie Romane/CRUIPRO)</li> <li>• Fr. Mark A. LEWIS SJ, Academic Vice-Rector at the Pontifical Gregorian University (Rome)</li> <li>• Fr. Dinh Anh Nhue NGUYEN OFMConv, President of the Pontifical Theological Faculty of St Bonaventure "<i>Seraphicum</i>" (Rome)</li> <li>• Msgr. Antonio PITTA, Pro-rector of the Pontifical Lateran University/PUL</li> <li>• Fr. Diego SARRIÓ CUCARELLA MAfrD., President of the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies/PISAI (Rome)</li> </ul>	<b>INTERPRETER:</b> for one or two of the persons
15.15 -15- 30 15 min	Panel private discussion	--	--

15.30 – 16.45 75 min	Views of AVEPRO work and role in the framework of the Holy See Higher Education System Expert participation in reviews and other activities of AVEPRO; focus on consistency in reviews, training, visit organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rev. I. BOYKO, Professor at the Faculty of Philosophy and Theology of the Ukrainian Catholic University (Lviv, Ukraina)</li> <li>• Fiona HUNTER, QA Systems expert and Associate Director at the Centre for Higher Education Internationalisation/CHEI of the Sacred Heart University (Milan, Italy)</li> <li>• Fr. Grzegorz CHOJNACKI, Professor at the Faculty of Theology of University of Szczecin (Szczecin, Poland)</li> <li>• Msgr. Valentino BULGARELLI, President of the Theological Faculty of Emilia Romagna (Bologna, Italy)</li> <li>• Declan O'BYRNE, Professor of Theology at the SOPHIA University Institute (Loppiano, Italy)</li> </ul>	
16.45 – 17.00 15 min	Panel Discussion in private - break	--	--
17.00 – 17.45 45 min	Meeting with Student representatives and student reviewers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rev. George AYUB, PHD student at the Alphonsian Academy /Accademia Alfonsiana, Istituto Superiore di Teologia Morale (Rome)</li> <li>• Marino MARANGELLI, President of the Students Association of the Roman Pontifical Universities/SUPR</li> <li>• Antonella PICCININ; Student at the Faculty of Canon Law of the Pontifical Lateran University (Rome)</li> </ul>	<b>INTERPRETER:</b> for one or two of the persons
17.45 – 18.30 45 min	Panel private discussion	--	--
19.30	Panel dinner – <b>Domus Sanctae Marthae</b>	--	--

DAY 2 → Thursday December 5th 2019			
Timing	topic	Persons for interview	Issues to be discussed
9.00 – 9.45 45 min	Meeting with Congregation for Catholic Education/CCE – CCE Offices, Piazza Pio XII, 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• H.E. Card. Giuseppe VERSALDI, Prefect</li> <li>• H.E. Msgr. Angelo Vincenzo ZANI, Secretary</li> <li>• Msgr. Philippe CURBELIÉ, Head of University Office</li> <li>• Fr. Friedrich BECHINA, F.S.O., Under-Secretary of the Congregation for Catholic Education/CCE</li> </ul>	INTERPRETER: for one or two of the persons
09.45 – 10.00 15 min	Transfer to AVEPRO's offices	--	--

10.00-10.15 15 min	AVEPRO's offices Panel private discussion	--	--
10.15 – 11.15 60 min	Meeting with Stakeholders and network and Religious Superiors + Bologna experts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fr. Pablo Carlos SICOULY OP, socius for the Intellectual Life of the Order of Friars Preachers</li> <li>• Raquel PÉREZ, Secretary director at the Episcopal Under-commission for Universities of the Spanish Episcopal Conference/Conferencia Episcopal Española</li> </ul>	
11.15 – 11.30 15 min	Panel private discussion	--	--
11.30 – 12.15 45 min	Meeting with QA Directors / Officers in Ecclesiastical Faculties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cecilia GATTI, Administrative manager of the QA office at the Pontifical Lateran University/PUL</li> <li>• Carmine MATARAZZO, QA responsible at the Pontificia Facoltà Teologica dell'Italia Meridionale/PFTIM (Naples, Italy)</li> <li>• Fr. Dominic FARRELL, L.C., Director of the Quality office, Pontifical Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum</li> </ul>	INTERPRETER: for one or two of the persons
12.15 – 12.30 15 min	Panel private discussion	--	--
12.30 - 13.30 60 min	Meeting with AVEPRO Scientific Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Isabel M. De Oliveira CAPELOA GIL, Rector the Catholic University of Portugal/Universidade Católica Portuguesa and International Federation of Catholic Universities/IFCU President</li> <li>• John DAVIES, Professor Emeritus (Former Pro-Vice Chancellor at the Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, UK) for Research</li> <li>• Caty DUYKAERTS, head of the Executive Unit of the Agency for Evaluation of Higher Education Quality in the French Community of Belgium/AEQES</li> <li>• Peter JONKERS, Professor of Philosophy at Tilburg University (Tilburg, the Netherlands) and member of the Board of the European Society for Philosophy of Religion and member of the Steering Committee of FISP/Fédération Internationale des Sociétés de Philosophie</li> </ul>	
13.30 – 14.30 60 min	Lunch, panel meeting in private	--	--
14.30 – 15.15 45 min	Panel private discussion	--	--
15.15 – 15.45 30 min	Meeting with President and Managing Director (optional) (meeting was not requested)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• P. Andrzej WODKA C.S.S.R., President</li> <li>• Riccardo CINQUEGRANI, Director</li> </ul>	Clarification of last remaining questions



15.45 – 17.00 75 min	Panel private discussion	--	--
17.00- 17.30 30min	Short feedback from review team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• P. Andrzej WODKA C.SS.R., President</li> <li>• Riccardo CINQUEGRANI, Director</li> <li>• Samanta BONGINI</li> <li>• Valerio NAPOLEONI</li> </ul>	--
--	End of review Departure of the panel members or	--	--
19.30	Dinner - Domus Sanctae Marthae	--	--

## **ANNEX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE REVIEW**

*External review of the Holy See's Agency for the Evaluation and Promotion of Quality in Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties (AVEPRO)  
by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)*

### **Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE**

*February 2019*

#### **I. Background and Context**

*The Holy See's Agency for the Evaluation and Promotion of Quality in Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties (AVEPRO) was established on 19 September 2007 by Pope Benedict XVI. The idea of creating an Agency came from the Holy See's adherence to the Bologna Process in 2003. The aim was to strengthen the focus on academic quality through the implementation of new tools and procedures suited to current needs. Moreover, as encouraged by the Bologna Process and subsequently by the establishment of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the Agency cooperates with Institutions as part of a common effort to harmonize the various higher education systems.*

*The Agency is the QA authority for 203 Ecclesiastical Faculties located in Europe and other 78 in the rest of the world (updated 2018), without mentioning other numerous institutions, incorporated, aggregated or affiliated to those Universities or Faculties. Moreover, the Statute of the Agency (art. 4 § 2), foresees that "For any specific exigencies, the Agency, with the consent of the Congregation for Catholic Education, can implement forms of cooperation with other Institutions in order to respond to the demands of different countries or geographical areas". This offers to Catholic Universities, for example, the opportunity (under specific and motivated circumstances) to undergo the evaluation following AVEPRO's model and guidelines.*

*AVEPRO's mission is to promote and develop a culture of quality within the academic institutions that depend directly on the Holy See and ensure they possess internationally valid quality criteria, as established by the Bologna Process.*

*AVEPRO's activities are regulated by the Apostolic Constitution Veritatis Gaudium (8 December 2018) and it conforms to the European Standards and Guidelines, as well as other international agreements concerning rules and procedures for the evaluation of quality in higher education.*

*Three are the key features of AVEPRO:*

- 1. it is an Agency that has to deal with international and universal dimension because of its nature. All Faculties award the same kind of degrees under the direct authority and in the name of the Holy See which has signed and ratified the four regional/continental Conventions for recognition of UNESCO. Thus these academic degrees are recognized in most countries of the world;*
- 2. in general terms it has to deal with a specific/sectorial branch of knowledge and science and subsequently with a limited number of university disciplines or fields of study. Among those, the "traditional" and most frequent are Theology, Philosophy and Canon Law. In more recent times other (specialized) Faculties have been or can be canonically erected, according to the needs of the Church;*
- 3. its mission is partially devoted to the evaluation of Academic Institutions but a consistent part of its activities are aimed at promoting Quality Culture in the frame of the Higher Education System of the Holy See.*

*AVEPRO has been a member of ENQA since 2014 and is applying for renewal of membership in ENQA.*

## **2. Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation**

This review, will evaluate the way in which and to what extent AVEPRO fulfils the requirements of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). Consequently, the review will provide information to the ENQA Board to aid its consideration of whether membership of AVEPRO should be reconfirmed.

The review panel is not expected, however, to make any judgements as regards granting membership.

### **2.1 Activities of AVEPRO within the scope of the ESG**

In order for AVEPRO to apply for ENQA membership and for registration in EQAR, this review will analyse all activities of AVEPRO that are within the scope of the ESG, i.e. reviews, audits, evaluations or accreditation of higher education institutions or programmes that relate to teaching and learning (and their relevant links to research and innovation). This is regardless of whether these activities are carried out within or outside the EHEA, and whether they are obligatory or voluntary.

The following activities of AVEPRO has to be addressed in the external review:

- Institutional evaluation of Ecclesiastical Faculties and Universities.

## **3. The Review Process**

The process is designed in the light of the Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews.

The evaluation procedure consists of the following steps:

- Formulation of the Terms of Reference and protocol for the review;
- Nomination and appointment of the review panel;
- Self-assessment by AVEPRO including the preparation of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit by the review panel to AVEPRO;
- Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report by the review panel;
- Scrutiny of the final evaluation report by the ENQA Review Committee;
- Analysis of the scrutiny by the ENQA Board and their decision regarding ENQA membership;
- Follow-up of the panel's and/or ENQA Board's recommendations by the agency, including a voluntary follow-up visit.

### **3.1 Nomination and appointment of the review team members**

The review panel consists of four members: one or two quality assurance experts, an academic employed by a higher education institution, student member, and eventually a labour market representative (if requested). One of the members will serve as the chair of the review panel, and another member as a review secretary. For ENQA Agency Reviews at least one of the reviewers is an ENQA nominee (most often the QA professional[s]). At least one of the reviewers is appointed from the nominees of either the European University Association (EUA) or the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), and the student member is always selected from among the ESU-nominated reviewers. If requested, the labour market representative may come from the Business Europe nominees or from ENQA. An additional panel member may be included in the panel at the request of the agency under review. In this case an additional fee to cover the reviewer's fee and travel expenses is applied.

The panel will be supported by the ENQA Secretariat review coordinator who will monitor the integrity of the process and ensure that ENQA expectations are met throughout the process. The ENQA staff member will not be the Secretary of the review and will not participate in the discussions during the site visit interviews.

Current members of the ENQA Board are not eligible to serve as reviewers.

ENQA will provide AVEPRO with the list of suggested experts with their respective curriculum vitae to establish that there are no known conflicts of interest. The experts will have to sign a non-conflict of interest statement as regards the AVEPRO review.

### **3.2 Self-assessment by AVEPRO, including the preparation of a self-assessment report**

AVEPRO is responsible for the execution and organisation of its own self-assessment process and shall take into account the following guidance:

- Self-assessment is organised as a project with a clearly defined schedule and includes all relevant internal and external stakeholders;
- The self-assessment report is broken down by the topics of the evaluation and is expected to contain, among others: a brief description of the national HE and QA system; background description of the current situation of the Agency; an analysis and appraisal of the current situation; proposals for improvement and measures already planned; a SWOT analysis; each criterion (ESG part II and III) addressed individually. All agency's QA activities (whether within their national jurisdiction or outside of it, and whether obligatory or voluntary) will be described and their compliance with the ESG analysed.
- The report is well-structured, concise and comprehensively prepared. It clearly demonstrates the extent to which AVEPRO fulfils its tasks of external quality assurance and meets the ESG and thus the requirements of ENQA membership.
- The self-assessment report is submitted to the ENQA Secretariat who has 4 weeks to pre-scrutinise it before forwarding the report to the panel of experts. The purpose of the pre-scrutiny is to ensure that the self-assessment report is satisfactory for the consideration of the panel. The Secretariat will not judge the content of information itself but whether the necessary information, as stated in the ENQA Guidelines for External Review of Quality Assurance Agencies, is present. For the second and subsequent reviews, the agency is expected to enlist the recommendations provided in the previous review and to outline actions taken to meet these recommendations. In case the self-assessment report does not contain the necessary information and seriously fails to respect the requested form and content, the ENQA Secretariat reserves the right to reject the report and ask for a revised version within 2 weeks. In cases of serious shortcomings or serious disregard to the guidelines of ENQA in this respect, an additional fee of 1 000 € will be charged to the agency.
- The report is submitted to the review panel a minimum of six weeks prior to the site visit.

### **3.3 A Site Visit by the Review Panel**

AVEPRO will draw up a draft proposal of the schedule for the site visit to be submitted to the review panel at least two months before the planned dates of the visit. The schedule includes an indicative timetable of the meetings and other exercises to be undertaken by the review panel during the site visit, the duration of which is estimated at 2,5 days. The approved schedule shall be given to AVEPRO at least one month before the site visit, in order to properly organise the requested interviews.

The review panel will be assisted by AVEPRO in the Holy See.

The site visit will close with a final de-briefing meeting outlining the panel's overall impressions but not its judgement on the granting or reconfirmation of ENQA membership.

### **3.4 Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report**

On the basis of the review panel's findings, the review secretary will draft the report in consultation with the review panel. The report will take into account the purpose and scope of the evaluation as defined under articles 2 and 2.1. It will also provide a clear rationale for its findings with regards to each ESG. A draft will be first submitted to the ENQA review coordinator who will check the report for consistency, clarity and language and it will be then submitted to AVEPRO within 11 weeks of the site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If AVEPRO chooses to provide a statement in reference to the draft report it will be submitted to the chair of the review panel within two weeks after the receipt of the draft report. Thereafter the review panel will take into account the statement by AVEPRO, finalise the document and submit it to ENQA.

The report is to be finalised within three months of the site visit and will not exceed 40 pages in length.

AVEPRO is also requested to provide a letter addressed to the ENQA Board outlining its motivation applying for membership and the ways in which AVEPRO expects to contribute to the work and objectives of ENQA during its membership. This letter will be discussed along with the final evaluation report.

### **4. Follow-up Process and Publication of the Report**

AVEPRO will consider the expert panel's report and will publish it on its website once the ENQA Board has made its decision. The report will also be published on the ENQA website, regardless of the review outcome and decision by the ENQA Board. AVEPRO commits to preparing a follow-up plan in which it addresses the recommendations of the review panel and to submitting a follow-up report to the ENQA Board. The follow-up report will be published on the ENQA website, in addition to the full review report and the Board's decision.

The follow-up report will be complemented by a small-scale visit to the agency performed by two members of the original panel (whenever possible). This visit will be used to discuss issues, based on the ESG, considered as of particular importance or challenge by AVEPRO. Its purpose is entirely developmental and has no impact on the judgement of membership and/or compliance of the agency with the ESG. Should the agency not wish to take advantage of this opportunity, it may opt out by informing the ENQA Review Coordinator about this.

### **5. Use of the report**

ENQA shall retain ownership of the report. The intellectual property of all works created by the expert panel in connection with the review contract, including specifically any written reports, shall be vested in ENQA.

The review report is used by the Board of ENQA for the purpose of reaching a conclusion on whether AVEPRO has met the ESG and can be thus admitted/reconfirmed as a member of ENQA. Until it is approved by the ENQA Board the report may not be used or relied upon by AVEPRO, the panel and any third party and may not be disclosed without the prior written consent of ENQA. AVEPRO may thus use the report at its discretion only after the Board has approved of the report. The approval of the report is independent of the decision on membership.

The Chair of the panel shall remain available to respond to questions of clarification or further information from the EQAR Register Committee provided that the ENQA Secretariat is copied in all such requests.

### **6. Budget**

AVEPRO shall pay the review related fees as specified in the agreement between ENQA and AVEPRO.

*It is understood, that the fee of the progress visit is included in the overall cost of the review and will not be reimbursed in case the agency does not wish to benefit from it.*

*In the event of a second site visit required by the ENQA Board and aiming at completing the assessment of compliance, and should the agency accept a second visit, additional fees will be charged.*

## **7. Indicative Schedule of the Review**

<i>Agreement on terms of reference</i>	<i>March 2019</i>
<i>Appointment of review panel members</i>	<i>April 2019</i>
<i>Self-assessment completed</i>	<i>By 15 September 2019</i>
<i>Pre-screening of SAR by ENQA coordinator</i>	<i>By end September 2019</i>
<i>Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable</i>	<i>September-October 2019</i>
<i>Briefing of review panel members</i>	<i>October 2019</i>
<i>Review panel site visit</i>	<i>December 2019</i>
<i>Draft of evaluation report and submitting it to ENQA coordinator for pre-screening</i>	<i>February 2020</i>
<i>Draft of evaluation report to AVEPRO</i>	<i>March 2020</i>
<i>Statement of AVEPRO to review panel if necessary</i>	<i>March/April 2020</i>
<i>Submission of final report to ENQA</i>	<i>April/May 2020</i>
<i>Consideration of the report by ENQA Board and response of AVEPRO</i>	<i>June 2020</i>
<i>Publication of report</i>	<i>June/July 2020</i>

## ANNEX 3: GLOSSARY

AVEPRO	Agenzia della Santa Sede per la Valutazione e la Promozione della Qualità delle Università e Facoltà Ecclesiastiche
CCE	Congregation for Catholic Education
EEC	External Evaluation Commission
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ESG	<i>Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2015</i>
HE	higher education
HEI	higher education institution
QA	quality assurance
QIP	quality improvement plan
SAR	self-assessment report
SUPR	Students Association of the Roman Pontifical Universities

## ANNEX 4. DOCUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE REVIEW

### DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY AVEPRO

#### VATICAN

- Address of His Holiness Pope Francis, Presentation of the Christmas greetings to the Roman Curia (22 December 2016)
- Apostolic constitution *Ex corde ecclesiae* (John Paul II 15 August 1990)
- Apostolic constitution *Evangelii gaudium* (Francis, 24 November 2013)
- Apostolic constitution *Pastor bonus* (John Paul II, 28 June 1988)
- Apostolic constitution *Sapientia christiana* (John Paul II, 15 April 1979)
- Apostolic constitution *Veritatis gaudium* on Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties (Francis, 8 December 2017)
- *Chirographum* (Benedict XVI, 19 September 2007)
- *Conventio/Agreement* between the HOLY SEE and the Republic of Lithuania on co-operation in education and culture
- Code of Canon Law
- Document on “Human Fraternity for world peace and living together” signed by His Holiness Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmad al-Tayyib (Abu Dhabi, 4 February 2019)
- General Rules of the Roman Curia/*Regolamento generale della Curia Romana* (30 April 1999) (only in Italian)
- Gravissimum Educationis Foundation website
- Lecture by Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran on the theme “The Presence of the Holy See in the International Organizations”
- Letter of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to HE Secretary of State Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, November 20th 1982/*Lettera di Giovanni Paolo II al Cardinale Segretario di Stato Agostino Casaroli* (only in Italian)
- *Motu proprio* (apostolic letter issued *motu proprio*), *Fidelis dispensator et prudens* (Francis, 24 February 2014)
- *Motu proprio*, Law on the Government of Vatican City State (Francis, 25 November 2018)
- *Motu proprio*, Statutes of the Secretariat for Communication (Francis, 6 September 2016)
- Vatican City State website
- Vincenzo Buonomo, “The Holy See in the contemporary international relation.
- A juridical approach following the international law and praxis” in “CIVITAS ET IUSTITIA” Review of the Faculty of Law of the Pontifical Lateran University, II (2004), pp. 7-40

#### Congregation for Catholic Education/CCE

- CCE/Circular Letter n° 1/2018
- CCE, *Educatio catholica* 3/2017 “Agency for the Evaluation and Promotion of Quality”
- CCE, Letter of Appointment of the AVEPRO President to the Commission for the implementation of the Apostolic constitution *Veritatis gaudium*
- CCE, Reform of the Higher Institutes of Religious Sciences (28 June 2008)
- CCE, Qualifications framework
- CCE website
- Ecclesiastical Institutions database, specific section of the CEC website

#### Other stakeholders

- BOE/Boletín Oficial del Estado num.276, Real Decreto 1619/2011
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- CCXIV General Chapter of the Order of the Servants of Mary (October 2019) Commission on the Pontifical Theological Faculty “Marianum”
- Conference of the Rectors’ of the Pontifical Roman Universities - Conferenza dei Rettori delle Università Pontificie Romane/CRUIPRO website
- EHEA Bologna Policy Forum, Statement of the fifth Bologna Policy Forum
- EHEA Bologna Policy Forum, ministerial declarations and communiqués
- EHEA, Paris Communiqué adopted at the EHEA Ministerial Conference in Paris (25th May 2018)
- ENQA, EQArep /Transparency of European Higher Education Through Public Quality Assurance Reports - Final report of the project
- ENQA - HAQAA Initiative "Harmonization of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation" (2016)
- Episcopal Conference – Italy/Conferenza Episcopale Italiana website
- Episcopal Conference – France/Conférence des évêques de France website
- Episcopal Conference – Spain/Conferencia Episcopal Española website
- EUA website
- EUA, 2019: Quality Assurance in Africa, Asia and Europe: differences and similarities, by T. Loukkola
- European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018. The European Higher Education Area in 2018: Bologna Process Implementation Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union
- European Commission/The Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area website
- EU-SHARE/European Union support to Higher Education in the Asean Region website
- INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice (revised edition 2016)
- International Federation of Catholic Universities/IFUC - Fédération Internationale des Universités Catholiques/FIUC website
- IPSAS standards – IPSAS Board
- LAS, Salesianum I/LXXXI/2019 (ianuarius-martius) “Veritatis gaudium”, Riccardo Cinquegrani “Quality in relation to certain challenges introduced by Veritatis gaudium”
- NAKVIS-AVEPRO Memorandum of understanding
- NOKUT, Quality areas for study programmes
- SUPR/Studenti delle Università Pontificie Romane/Students of the Roman Pontifical Universities website
- UKÄ, Seminar “Universities in defence of science and common good”
- Union des Etablissements d’Enseignement Supérieur Catholique/UEDESCA website

## **AVEPRO**

- AVEPRO website
- AVEPRO, Analysis of the External Evaluation reports 2014-2017
- AVEPRO, Analysis of evaluation reports 2012-2014
- AVEPRO, Annual Report 2014
- AVEPRO, Annual Report 2015
- AVEPRO, Annual Report 2016
- AVEPRO, Annual Report 2017
- AVEPRO, Annual Report 2018
- AVEPRO, Annual Report 2019
- AVEPRO, Briefings and Agendas 2018-2019
- AVEPRO, Budgets 2015-2019
- AVEPRO, Economic documents
- AVEPRO, Elements for a “Mid-term” Self-Assessment
- AVEPRO, ESG 2015: Comparative analysis of Guidelines among European QA Agencies
- AVEPRO, Evaluation of the HE Ecclesiastical Institutions located in Rome (2015)
- AVEPRO, Evaluation report TEMPLATE
- AVEPRO, Experts database
- AVEPRO, Follow Up Reports on ENQA Site Visit (2014 and 2016)
- AVEPRO, Guidelines (all 5 documents)

- AVEPRO, Guideline: Nature, context, purpose, standards and procedures of Quality evaluation and promotion (Guidelines A)
- AVEPRO, Guidelines for Self-Evaluation (Guidelines B)
- AVEPRO, Guidelines for External Evaluation (Guidelines C)
- AVEPRO, Guidelines on Strategic Planning (Guidelines D)
- AVEPRO, Ecclesiastical higher education system in the global world
- Rationales of AVEPRO evaluation system (Guidelines E)
- AVEPRO, Insights for the development of Institutional Strategic Plans
- AVEPRO, Insights for the evaluation of PhD
- AVEPRO, Minutes of the 10th Board of Directors meeting
- AVEPRO, Minutes of the 9th Board of Directors meeting
- AVEPRO, Minutes of the 8th Board of Directors meeting
- AVEPRO, Minutes of the 7th Board of Directors meeting
- AVEPRO, Minutes of the 6th Board of Directors meeting
- AVEPRO, Minutes of the 5th Board of Directors meeting
- AVEPRO, Minutes of the 6th Scientific Council meeting
- AVEPRO, Minutes of the 5th Scientific Council meeting
- AVEPRO, President's evaluation of the staff
- AVEPRO, Questionnaires for self-evaluation (for teaching staff; students; service unit staff; students service unit)
- AVEPRO, Report on the questionnaire 2019
- AVEPRO, Statute of the Agency
- AVEPRO, Self-Evaluation Report/SER FORM
- AVEPRO, Self-Evaluation Report/SER analysis FORM
- AVEPRO, Site visit - sample programme
- AVEPRO, Strategic Plan (updated version 2019)
- AVEPRO, Summary of evaluation activities at the Italian Faculties of Theology (2015)
- AVEPRO, Summary of evaluation activities conducted at the Ecclesiastical Academic Institutions present in Spain 2016-2018
- AVEPRO, Table of contents of the Dossier for the CCE Plenary 2020
- AVEPRO, Table of contents of the Dossier for the CCE Plenary 2017
- AVEPRO, The Regional/National procedure model
- AVEPRO, Training of experts- modules (under revision)
- (AVEPRO) Evaluation commission, Evaluation report of the Catholic Theological Private University of Linz (2015)
- (AVEPRO) Evaluation commission Evaluation report of the Theological Faculty at the Vytautas Magnus University's/VMU (2014)

## ENQA AGENCY REVIEW 2020

THIS REPORT presents findings of the ENQA Agency Review of the Holy See's Agency for the Evaluation and Promotion of Quality in Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties (AVEPRO), undertaken in 2019.