

External review of the Swiss Agency of the Accreditation and Quality Assurance (AAQ)
by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE

January 2020

1. Background and context

Established by the Federal Act on Funding and Coordination of the Higher Education Sector (HEdA) on January 1st, 2015, the Swiss Agency for Accreditation and Quality Assurance AAQ is the successor of the Swiss Center of Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education (OAQ), which operated from 2001 to 2014. It receives public funding by the Swiss Confederation and the university Cantons, besides mandate-based funds.

AAQ is the only Swiss agency active in the field of quality assurance and accreditation in higher education. It contributes to the development of a culture of quality in the higher education landscape.

AAQ carries out accreditation procedures based on the HEdA. Furthermore, the Swiss laws on medical, psychology and health professions assign to the AAQ the role of accreditation body for basic education and advanced professional training in medicine, for advanced professional training in the psychology professions (e.g. psychotherapy) and for basic education in the health professions such as physiotherapy, ergotherapy, etc.

Since 2011 AAQ carries out system accreditation in Germany according to the German legislation and is entitled to conduct Quality Audits in Austria according to the Austrian legislation.

Furthermore, the AAQ is authorized to deliver the EUR-ACE label to accredited engineering higher education programmes. Finally, tailor-made national and international evaluations can also be carried out with specific mandates.

AAQ has been a member of ENQA since 2006 (taking into consideration the registry on EQAR of the predecessor, the OAQ) and is applying for ENQA renewal of membership.

AAQ has been registered on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) since 2011 (taking into consideration the registry on EQAR of the predecessor, the OAQ) and is applying for renewal of EQAR registration.

2. Purpose and scope of the evaluation

This review will evaluate the extent to which AAQ 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 Board of ENQA to aid its consideration of whether membership of AAQ should be reconfirmed and to EQAR to support AAQ application to the register.

2.1 Activities of AAQ within the scope of the ESG

In order for AAQ to renew its ENQA membership and for registration in EQAR, this review will analyse all activities of AAQ 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 independent of whether the activities are carried out within or outside the EHEA and whether they are obligatory or voluntary.

The following activities of AAQ have to be addressed in the external review:

- Institutional accreditation in Switzerland according to HEdA (core activity)
- Programme accreditation in Switzerland (according to HEdA, to the Medical Professions Act and to the Health Professions Act)
- System accreditation in Germany
- Certification procedures in Austria (institutional Q-audit)
- Tailor-made evaluation procedures.

3. The review process

The review will be conducted following the methodology of ENQA Agency Reviews. The process is designed in line with *the Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and the requirements of *the EQAR Procedures for Applications*.

The evaluation procedure consists of the following steps:

- Formulation of the draft Terms of Reference for the review;
- Finalising the Terms of Reference for the review following EQAR's Eligibility Confirmation (if relevant);
- Nomination and appointment of the review panel;
- Self-assessment by AAQ including the preparation and publication of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit by the review panel to AAQ;
- 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 Board of ENQA and their decision regarding ENQA membership;
- Follow-up of the panel's and/or the Board's recommendations by the agency, including a voluntary progress visit.

3.1 Nomination and appointment of the review team members

The review panel consists of four members: one or two quality assurance experts (at least one of which is currently employed by an ENQA member agency), an academic employed by a higher education institution, a student member. 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. 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. Although the review is carried out in English, competencies in the German and French languages are to be assured within the panel members.

The panel will be supported by the ENQA Secretariat review coordinator who will monitor the integrity of the process and ensure that ENQA's requirements 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 Board of ENQA are not eligible to serve as reviewers.

ENQA will provide AAQ with the list of suggested experts and their respective curricula vitarum 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 AAQ review.

3.2 Self-assessment by AAQ, including the preparation of a self-assessment report

AAQ 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 AAQ 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 which has four 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 Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews, 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 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 two weeks. In such cases, an additional fee of 1000 EUR 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

The review panel will draft a proposal of the site visit schedule which shall be submitted to the agency at least two months before the planned dates of the visit. The schedule is to include 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 usually 2,5 days. The approved schedule shall be given to AAQ at least one month before the site visit, in order to properly organise the requested interviews.

The review panel will be assisted by AAQ in arriving in Bern, Switzerland.

The site visit will close with a final de-briefing meeting outlining the panel's overall impressions but not its judgement on the ESG compliance of the agency or 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 concerning each ESG. A draft will first be submitted to the ENQA review coordinator who will check the report for consistency, clarity and language, and it will be then submitted to AAQ usually within 10 weeks of the site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If AAQ chooses to provide a position statement in reference to the draft report, it will be submitted to the chair of the review panel within three weeks after the receipt of the draft report. Thereafter, the review panel will take into account the statement by AAQ and finalise and submit the document to ENQA.

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

When preparing the report, the review panel should also bear in mind the *EQAR Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG* to ensure that the report will contain sufficient information for the Register Committee for application to EQAR.

For the purpose of applying for ENQA membership, AAQ is also requested to provide a letter addressed to the Board of ENQA outlining its motivation for applying for membership and the ways in which AAQ expects to contribute to the work and objectives of ENQA during its membership. This letter will be taken into consideration by the Board of ENQA together with the final evaluation report when deciding on the agency's membership.

4. Follow-up process and publication of the report

AAQ will receive the expert panel's report and publish it on its website once the Board of ENQA has made its decision. The report will also be published on the ENQA website, regardless of the review outcome and decision by the Board. AAQ 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 Board of ENQA within the timeframe indicated in the Board's decision on membership. 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 could be complemented by a small-scale progress 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 to be of particular importance or a challenge to AAQ. Its purpose is entirely developmental and has no impact on the judgement of membership and/or judgment of 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 AAQ is in compliance with the ESG and can thus be admitted/reconfirmed as a member of ENQA. The report can also be used for registration on EQAR, and is designed to serve these two purposes. However, the review report is to be considered final only after being approved by the Board. Once submitted to ENQA and until it is approved by the Board, the report may not be used or relied upon by AAQ, the panel, or any third party and may not be disclosed without the prior written consent of ENQA. The approval of the report is independent of the decision of the ENQA Board on membership.

6. Budget

AAQ shall pay the review related fees as specified in the contract between ENQA and AAQ.

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 board of ENQA and aiming at completing the assessment of compliance, and should the agency accept a second visit, an additional fee of 500 EUR per expert, as well as the travel and subsistence costs related to the second site visit will be charged to the agency.

7. Indicative schedule of the review

Agreement on terms of reference	January 2020
Appointment of review panel members	February 2020
Self-assessment completed	20 June 2020
Pre-screening of SAR by ENQA coordinator	July 2020
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	September 2020
Briefing of review panel members	October 2020
Review panel site visit	First half of November 2020
Draft of evaluation report and submitting it to ENQA coordinator for pre-screening	December 2020
Draft of evaluation report to AAQ	January 2021
Statement of AAQ to review panel if necessary	February 2021
Submission of final report to ENQA	March 2021
Consideration of the report by Board of ENQA	April 2021
Publication of report	May 2021