CYPRUS AGENCY OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION (CYQAA)

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European Association for
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report analyses the compliance of the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education (CYQAA) with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG 2015). It is based on an ENQA external review, following the methodology described in the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and considering the EQAR Register Committee's *Use and Interpretation of the ESG*. The review aimed to support CYQAA's application for the renewal of its membership of ENQA and its registration on EQAR. It was conducted between February and December 2023. The site visit of the review panel to the agency in Nicosia, Cyprus, took place between 3 and 5 October 2023.

Established in 2015, CYQAA is the only national body responsible for external quality assurance of higher education in the Republic of Cyprus. It was granted ENQA membership in 2018 and included in EQAR in 2019. The agency's vision is to develop and sustain a quality culture among higher education institutions, stakeholders and society, and to enable institutions to work toward the improvement of their programmes and institutional structures, in line with the ESG, the principles of the European Higher Education Area and the Lisbon Recognition Convention. In its mission, CYQAA aims to safeguard standards and provide support, through the procedures set by the legislation and the principles underlying the European Higher Education Area, for continuous improvement of institutions and their programmes, in order to comply with the ESG and the European policy for mobility and mutual recognition of qualifications. It also aims to promote quality culture in higher education institutions in Cyprus.

CYQAA's external quality assurance activities include the following initial and periodic evaluation processes: institutional evaluation-accreditation; departmental evaluation-accreditation; programme evaluation-accreditation; joint programme evaluation-accreditation; and evaluation-accreditation of cross-border higher education provided by local institutions in member states or third-party countries. While only universities undergo departmental evaluations, the other processes are mandatory for all types of higher education institutions. Periodic evaluations are conducted every five years.

CYQAA is firmly established in law, pursues the goals set in its mission statement through regular external evaluations and knowledge-sharing activities for its stakeholders, and its significant contribution to quality improvement in higher education is recognised by all of its stakeholders. However, the agency's strategic plan is not sufficiently specific to demonstrate to its stakeholders how it seeks to achieve its goals, and there are no publicly available annual activity plans which would provide a sound basis for monitoring progress and demonstrating accountability towards its strategic goals. While universities, students and professional bodies have a good representation on the agency's governing body, the current arrangements do not provide for the involvement of non-university institutions in its governance, nor for the involvement of institutions other than the public universities in its evaluation processes. The extensive use of international experts adds real value to the work of the agency's governing body and its external evaluation processes.

Although the national authorities have a major role in the appointment and dismissal of members of CYQAA's governing body, the law and the mechanisms in place provide, in the panel's view, sufficient safeguards to its independence in organisational terms and in accreditation decision-making. Within the limits set by the law, it is also autonomous in designing its evaluation methodologies and selecting experts for its evaluations. However, the agency's operational independence is severely undermined by its inability to hire its own staff and the limited range of operating costs it can cover from its budget, and its reliance on seconded staff, premises and accounting services provided by the national authorities.

CYQAA is financially stable and has adequate resources to carry out its activities, although its staff have a heavy workload and no prospects for career advancement within the agency due to the constraints on its operational independence. The professionalism of the staff is highly valued by institutions and experts involved in evaluation processes. The agency uses its resources efficiently to regularly produce thematic reports based on meta-analyses of findings from its external evaluations; overall findings lead to improvements in its own evaluation processes and contribute to the enhancement of

policies and practices in higher education institutions. While there is some room for improvement in its internal quality assurance, the agency has in place policies and mechanisms to ensure that it acts in a professional and ethical manner, and uses stakeholder feedback to enhance its performance.

CYQAA's evaluation criteria embrace all standards of Part 1 of the ESG, and there has recently been a welcome shift in the focus of evaluations from merely checking whether internal quality assurance mechanisms are in place towards assessing their effectiveness. Stakeholders are genuinely involved in the development and continuous improvement of the agency's evaluation methodologies. Overall, the methodologies serve well their separate compliance-and-quality-enhancement purposes, and the agency has recently combined some evaluation processes to ease the burden on institutions. However, there is still room for streamlining processes, in particular for universities which undergo all types of evaluation, and eliminating an overlap in the evaluation criteria for the different processes. The processes and criteria are pre-defined and published, the processes follow the stages recommended in the ESG, and the agency has in place mechanisms for ensuring consistency in the application of the criteria and the implementation of the processes. The processes and the criteria are designed so that external evaluation committees collect sufficient evidence to make reliable judgments and useful recommendations, and provide a sound basis for the agency's accreditation decisions.

The composition of external evaluation committees complies with the letter of the respective standard of the ESG, but the pool from which student experts are selected is narrow being confined to candidates proposed by the public universities, and practitioners are involved only where an evaluation concerns a regulated profession. The agency takes care to select experts who are competent to do their job and impartial and provides them with a comprehensive briefing and guidelines; however, student experts would benefit from regular training to maximise their contribution to evaluations.

CYQAA's reporting arrangements comply with the respective standard of the ESG in terms of the structure and clarity of external evaluation reports, in that all external evaluation reports are published together with the agency's final reports which include accreditation decisions and, where appropriate, recommendations to be implemented by evaluated institutions.

The complaints procedure adequately covers the conduct of evaluation processes and the agency's own processes and is transparent. The appeals procedure allows institutions to question the judgment of an external evaluation committee and the agency's accreditation decision, whereas it is a well-established practice that an institution appeals a judgment on a process or procedural basis. Furthermore, the procedure does not ensure transparency in considering appeals as it relies on the same body that took the original accreditation decision to make final decisions on appeals.

This is the second ENQA review of CYQAA, and the agency is strongly motivated to undergo a cyclical external review to demonstrate its compliance with the ESG. It has implemented most of the recommendations and suggestions from the first review. The issues of its limited independence and the lack of transparency in its appeals processes, highlighted in the previous review report, have yet to be addressed, although the delay in addressing the former has been caused by the protracted process of amending the law that sets the framework for CYQAA's activities. The panel also recommends some improvements, such as the expansion of the stakeholder base with which the agency engages in its governance and evaluation processes and the streamlining of its evaluation processes, which were suggested by the previous review panel but have not yet been taken on board by the agency.

The panel found the agency to be compliant with ESG 3.2 (Official status), 3.4 (Thematic analysis), 3.5 (Resources), 3.6 (Internal quality assurance and professional conduct), 3.7 (Cyclical external review of agencies), and 2.1 (Consideration of internal quality assurance), 2.2 (Designing methodologies fit for purpose), 2.3 (implementing processes), 2.4 (Peer-review experts), 2.5 (Criteria for outcomes) and 2.6 (Reporting), and partially compliant with ESG 3.1 (Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance), 3.3 (Independence), and 2.7 (Complaints and appeals). In conclusion, the panel believes that CYQAA is in compliance with the ESG.

INTRODUCTION

This report analyses the compliance of the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education (Φορέας Διασφάλισης και Πιστοποίησης της Ποιότητας της Ανώτερης Εκπαίδευσης), CYQAA, with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG). It is based on an external review conducted in the period February to December 2023.

The review has been commissioned to provide information for the ENQA Board's decision on the renewal of CYQAA's membership and to support the agency's application for the renewal of its registration in EQAR.

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, to verify that they act in compliance with the ESG as adopted at the Yerevan ministerial conference of the Bologna Process in 2015.

Registration on EQAR is the official instrument established by the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) for demonstrating an agency's ESG compliance. An external review is a prerequisite for initial registration and such registration must be renewed every five years.

CYQAA became an ENQA affiliate in 2016. It underwent its first ENQA external review in 2018, and was granted membership of ENQA in 2018 and was entered on EQAR in 2019.

As this is CYQAA'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 at constant enhancement of the agencies.

SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

In accordance with the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the review, the report addresses the following external quality assurance (QA) activities of CYQAA:

1. Institutional evaluation – accreditation
2. Departmental Evaluation – accreditation
3. Programme evaluation – accreditation
4. Joint programme evaluation – accreditation
5. Evaluation – accreditation of cross border education provided by local institutions in member states[1] or in third-party countries (including e-learning programmes and franchise programmes).

As requested by EQAR in the ToR, in assessing CYQAA's compliance with the ESG, the review panel paid particular attention to the following issues where the Register found the agency to be only partially with the standards in its past decision:

- ESG 2.7 Complaints and appeals: the shortcomings related to the functioning of the Appeals Committee; the limited scope of the Complaints Procedure: whether it allows for the possibility to address complaints related to the conduct of a review or complaints concerning the agency's own processes; and the implementation and functioning of these procedures.

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[1] The term "member states" refers to the member states of the European Union, the countries that are parties to the European Economic Area Agreement, and Switzerland.

- ESG 3.3 Independence: the close interlinkage between CYQAA and the Ministry of Education and Culture (currently, the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth) considering the organisational arrangements and the clear separation of CYQAA from the Ministry in its staff recruitment process, infrastructure and management.

MAIN FINDINGS OF THE 2018 REVIEW

The 2018 review panel found CYQAA to be fully compliant with ESG 3.2 (Official status); 3.5 (Resources); 3.7 (Cyclical external review of agencies); and 2.2 (Designing methodologies fit for purpose); substantially compliant with ESG 3.1 (Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance); 3.3 (Independence); 3.6 (Internal quality assurance and professional conduct); 2.1 (Consideration of internal quality assurance); 2.3 (Implementing processes); 2.4 (Peer-review experts); 2.5 (Criteria for outcomes); and 2.7 (Complaints and appeals); partially compliant with ESG 2.6 (Reporting); and non-compliant with ESG 3.4 (Thematic analysis). The panel considered that non-compliance with ESG 3.4, which, unlike the other standards, refers to the research function of an agency rather than its core external QA assurance activities, had no bearing on how CYQAA operated as an organisation and conducted its core activities. Thus, it concluded that the agency was, overall, in compliance with the ESG.

The 2018 review panel commended CYQAA for conducting its activities in a way which had inspired trust in the newly established external QA system and promoted the value of quality among higher education institutions (ESG 3.1); managing efficiently its resources so as to combine core external QA activities with capacity development activities for itself and higher education institutions (ESG 3.5); ensuring, within the limits set by law, genuine involvement of higher education institutions in the development of its evaluation methodologies (ESG 2.2); and establishing a truly multinational pool of experts and ensuring their extensive involvement in evaluations (ESG 2.4).

Based on the review report, the ENQA Board considered that the panel was overly strict in judging CYQAA as non-compliant rather than partially compliant with ESG 3.4, having in mind the agency's first review against the ESG, its existing plans and the resources allocated to produce its first thematic analysis in 2019. However, the Board raised some additional concerns regarding ESG 3.3 and 2.7 and considered the agency to be partially rather than substantially compliant with these standards. Overall, the Board concluded that the agency was in compliance with the ESG.

The recommendations made by the 2018 review panel are reproduced, and the progress made by CYQAA since the previous review is discussed, under the relevant ESG in this review report.

In 2020, CYQAA submitted to ENQA a follow-up report on the recommendations in the panel's report, which was approved by the ENQA Board.

REVIEW PROCESS

The 2023 external review of CYQAA 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 ToR. The panel for the external review of CYQAA was appointed by ENQA and composed of the following members:

- Dr. Padraig Walsh (Chair, ENQA nominee), Chief Executive, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), Ireland;
- Ewa Kolanowska (Secretary, ENQA nominee), independent consultant, Poland;
- Dr. Paris Georgios Tsartas (EUA nominee), Professor of Tourism Development, Department of Home Economics and Ecology, Harokopio University of Athens, Greece;

- Pegi Pavletic (ESU nominee, member of the European Students' Union Quality Assurance Student Experts Pool), PhD Candidate in Pharmaceutical, Nutraceutical and Food Sciences, University of Camerino, Italy; Croatia.

Goran Dakovic, Head of Agency Reviews at ENQA, acted as the review coordinator.

The panel received CYQAA's self-assessment report (SAR) on 27 June 2023. It requested additional written clarifications on the national higher education context and the agency's activities (e.g. budget, staff recruitment, follow-up to external evaluation, appeals process). The review coordinator and the panel had an online briefing on 18 July 2023 to discuss details of the review process and share preliminary comments on the SAR. On 18 September 2023, the panel had a meeting with CYQAA's resource person on the national QA context and key features of the agency's external QA activities, and an online preparatory meeting. The site visit to the agency, preceded by the onsite clarification meeting and a preparatory meeting of the panel, took place between 3 and 5 October 2023. Based on the documentary and oral evidence collected, the panel drafted a review report in October 2023, which was screened by the review coordinator and submitted to CYQAA for a factual accuracy check on 10 November 2023. The agency provided its factual accuracy response on 27 November 2023. The panel submitted its final review report to ENQA on 29 November 2023.

All decisions of the panel were taken by consensus. The panel confirms that it had access to all documents and stakeholders it wished to consult throughout the review.

Self-assessment report

The agency set up a self-assessment working group, composed of the Chair and two members of the CYQAA Council, the Higher Administrative Officer and two Education Officers. In assessing the agency's activities against the ESG, the working group used various documents, including EHEA, ENQA and EQAR documents, national legislation, the Council's policy documents, CYQAA's Annual Activity Reports and correspondence between the agency and its stakeholders. It regularly briefed the Council and all staff on the progress in the self-assessment and gathered their feedback; all Education Officers were also involved in drafting the SAR. Feedback from external stakeholders was collected through a survey on CYQAA's external QA processes conducted among higher education institutions (HEIs), and in formal meetings with representatives of HEIs, students and the national authorities.

The SAR provided a description of the self-assessment process, the higher education and QA systems in Cyprus, and the history, profile and activities of CYQAA; evidence and reflections on its compliance with the standards of Parts 2 and 3 of the ESG, with links to the relevant documents; opinions of its stakeholders; recommendations of the previous review and follow-up action taken; a SWOT analysis; an overview of the main challenges and areas for development of the agency; and annexes including findings from the surveys conducted by CYQAA among its external evaluation experts and HEIs.

The review panel found the SAR to be informative, although some sections could have provided more specific or clearer information on the current arrangements regarding, in particular, ESG 2.2., 2.3, 2.4, 2.7 and 3.3; thus, the panel used the slots in the site visit agenda for both online and pre-visit onsite clarification meetings to gather additional or clarify available evidence. The SAR would have also benefitted from more in-depth and self-critical analysis regarding, in particular, the standards where major issues were identified by the previous review panel and / or ENQA and EQAR in their decisions (e.g. ESG 3.3 and 2.7), and where the changes recommended by the previous review panel and ENQA had not been introduced by the time of the submission of the SAR (ESG 3.3).

Site visit

The programme of the site visit (see Annex 1) was prepared jointly by the CYQAA liaison person and the panel. During the visit, the panel met with all key stakeholders of the agency, including its governing body, the SAR working group, staff, experts involved in an appeals process, peer review experts, and representatives of the national authorities, heads and QA officers of reviewed HEIs, and students and professional bodies. The visit ended with an internal meeting of the panel to agree on conclusions from the review and a debriefing for CYQAA on the main findings.

The panel would like to thank the team in CYQAA for their excellent organisation of the visit. The panel felt that their requests were accommodated, and the size of teams in each meeting was the right size to provide the panel with sufficient breadth of input, while allowing all participants an opportunity to contribute. Constructive engagement and an open and reflective approach of the participants in all meetings were highly appreciated by the panel.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM OF THE AGENCY

HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

Shortly after Cyprus gained independence (1960), the first public and private non-university HEIs were established in the 1960s to meet the social and economic needs of the country. The first public university, the University of Cyprus, was founded in 1989, with the first undergraduate students enrolled in 1992 and postgraduate students in 1997. The first three private universities, Frederick University, European University Cyprus and the University of Nicosia, were registered in 2007.

Currently, Cyprus has 63 HEIs, including 3 public and 9 private universities, and 6 public and 45 private non-university institutions, referred to as institutions of tertiary education or colleges. The legislative framework for the universities is set by the University of Cyprus Laws of 1989 to 2000, the Open University of Cyprus Law of 2022 and the Cyprus University of Technology Law of 2003 (for the public institutions) and the Private Universities (Establishment, Operation and Control) Law of 2005. Colleges operate in accordance with the Institutions of Tertiary Education Laws of 1996 to 2013.

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF), which corresponds to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), includes the following higher education qualifications: post-secondary certificates and diplomas (1 or 2 years) and higher certificates and diplomas (3 or more years) (NQF / EQF Level 5); university / Bachelor's degree (NQF / EQF Level 6); postgraduate certificates and diplomas, and Master's degree (NQF / EQF Level 7); and doctoral degree (NQF / EQF Level 8). Universities offer programmes at NQF / EQF Levels 6 to 8. Public colleges provide short-cycle programmes of 1, 2 or 3 years leading to a certificate, diploma or higher diploma at NQF / EQF Level 5, except for the Mediterranean Institute of Management, which offers Master's degree programmes. Private colleges provide professional undergraduate / Bachelor's degree and postgraduate programmes at NQF / EQF Levels 6 and 7, and short-cycle programmes of 1, 2 and 3 years at Level 5.

Student numbers have more than doubled over the last decade, reaching 54,235 in 2020/2021. While Cypriots represented around 70% of the student population a decade ago, they were outnumbered by international students (56%) in 2020/2021, with those coming from EU and non-EU countries representing, respectively, 40% and 16% of the population. In 2020/2021, 42,519 (78%) students were enrolled at universities and 11,716 (22%) at colleges. Most university students were following programmes at NQF / EQF Levels 6 (49%) and 7 (48%), and most college students were enrolled on programmes at Levels 6 (48%) and 5 (35%). The most popular fields of study at universities were Business Administration and Law (28% of students), Education (24%), and Medical Studies (15%); most college students chose Business Administration and Law (64%), Services (19%), and Engineering (6%).

Based on the data collected for universities only, most entrants in 2020/2021 chose private universities (80%), full-time programmes (77%) online programmes (60%), and Master's degree programmes (65%); 33% were enrolled on Bachelor's degree programmes and 2% on doctoral programmes. The majority of entrants came from EU countries (61%), mainly Greece, and Cyprus (31%).

QUALITY ASSURANCE

Between 1996 and 2015, the responsibility for external QA was shared between three bodies: the Advisory Committee on Higher Education (SETE), which advised the minister in charge of higher education on the establishment of non-university HEIs and new programmes to be offered by private non-university HEIs; the Council of Educational Evaluation-Accreditation (SEKAP), which accredited programmes provided by private non-university HEIs; and the Evaluation Committee for Private Universities (ECPU), which conducted institutional and programme evaluations. The minister endorsed accreditation or evaluation decisions taken by the responsible bodies, and the Council of Ministers issued licences for private universities. There were no mandatory external QA processes for public HEIs. In 2015, the Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education and the Establishment and Operation of an Agency on Related Matters Law established CYQAA, which took over the responsibilities of the three QA bodies, and uniform external QA procedures for all HEIs.

The external QA system currently includes the following five initial and periodic evaluation processes: (1) institutional evaluation-accreditation of all HEIs; (2) departmental evaluation-accreditation for university departments only; (3) programme evaluation-accreditation for all HEIs; (4) joint programme evaluation-accreditation; and (5) evaluation-accreditation of cross-border education (CBE) provided by local HEIs in member states or third-party countries. All processes are mandatory for HEIs. Periodic evaluations are conducted every five years. HEIs pay fees for external evaluations.

CYQAA conducts all types of the evaluation processes and takes accreditation decisions. Based on its decisions, the Minister of Education, Sport and Youth enters private HEIs and their programmes into the relevant Registers, and the Council of Ministers issues and renews licences for the operation of private HEIs. The Minister may instruct CYQAA to conduct an evaluation during an accreditation cycle to ascertain whether an HEI, department or programme continues to fulfil the accreditation criteria. Upon the recommendation from the Minister, the Council of Ministers appoints members of the CYQAA Council, the agency's governing body, except for a student member who is proposed by the Pancyprian Federation of Student Unions (POFEN). In the appointment process, the Minister is required by law to consult the Rectors Conference (a representative body of universities) and the competent professional bodies. The Council of Ministers may dismiss CYQAA Council members in cases specified in the legislation and upon the recommendation from the Minister.

CYPRUS AGENCY OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION (CYQAA)

CYQAA was established in 2015 by, and operates in accordance with, the Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education and the Establishment and Operation of an Agency on Related Matters Law of 2015, as subsequently amended. It is the only body responsible for quality assurance and accreditation recognised in the Republic of Cyprus.

CYQAA's vision is to develop and sustain a quality culture among HEIs, stakeholders and society, and to enable HEIs to work toward the improvement of their programmes and institutional structures, in line with the ESG, the principles of the EHEA and the Lisbon Recognition Convention. In its mission, the agency aims to safeguard standards and provide support, through the procedures provided by the

legislation and the principles underlying the EHEA, for continuous improvement and upgrading of HEIs and their programmes, in order to comply with the ESG and the European policy for mobility and mutual recognition of qualifications. It also aims to promote quality culture within the HEIs in Cyprus.

The agency pursues its vision and mission by conducting external evaluations, involving stakeholders in its governance and activities, providing information through online media, and organising knowledge-sharing seminars and conferences on higher education and QA issues for, and regular meetings with, its stakeholders.

CYQAA's ORGANISATION/STRUCTURE

CYQAA's governing body is the Council composed of 11 members: eight academics who hold the title of Professor or Professor Emeritus and have experience in university management and QA, including three international academics coming from at least two countries; two representatives of professional associations; and an undergraduate as a representative of students. The Council sets policies, takes decisions in evaluation-accreditation and appeals processes, drafts the agency's budget, prepares annual activity reports, and advises the Minister of Education, Sport and Youth on matters related to the functions of the agency. Academics and practitioners are appointed for a five-year term, and can be re-appointed for one subsequent term, by the Council of Ministers upon the recommendation from the Minister, who is required by law to consult the Rectors' Conference and the competent professional bodies. A student representative is proposed by POFEN and appointed for a two-year term. Upon the recommendation of the Minister, Council members can be dismissed by the Council of Ministers in the cases specified in the law.

The Chair of the Council, elected by its members, takes overall responsibility for the operation of the agency, manages its activities, oversees the implementation of policies and decisions adopted by the Council, and is the head of staff.
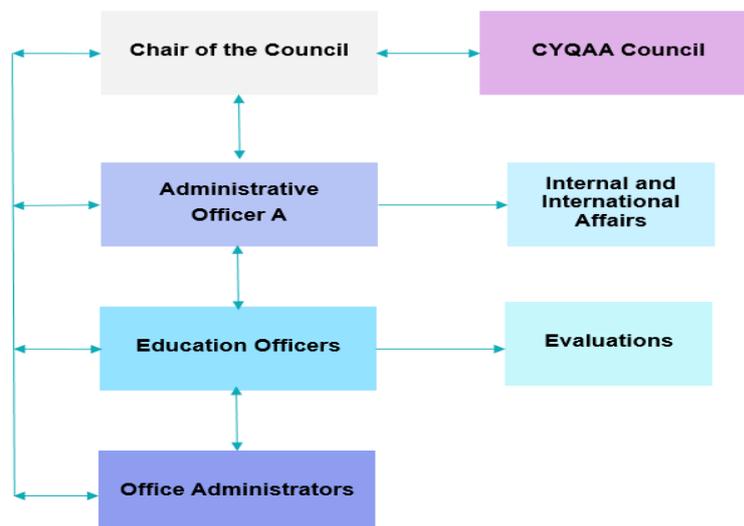
CYQAA has 12 staff members, including the Higher Administrative Officer (Administrative Officer A), nine Education Officers and two Administrative Assistants. The Higher Administrative Officer, who reports to the Chair, is responsible for day-to-day administration, and acts as the Secretary to the Council and as the internal QA Coordinator. Education Officers and Administrative Assistants report to the Chair of the Council, and to the Higher Administrative Officer for specific tasks. Education

Officers coordinate external evaluations and are involved in the agency's research activities. Assistants handle office management and administrative tasks.

CYQAA's FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES, PROCEDURES

CYQAA conducts the following initial and periodic external evaluations-accreditation reviews:

1. Institutional evaluation-accreditation of all types of HEIs;
2. Departmental evaluation-accreditation for departments of universities only;
3. Programme evaluation-accreditation for programmes provided by all types of HEIs;
4. Joint programme evaluation-accreditation for programmes provided by all types of HEIs;
5. Evaluation-accreditation of CBE provided by local HEIs in member states or third-party countries (including e-learning programmes and franchise programmes).

All external QA processes are mandatory for HEIs and aim to ensure that HEIs, departments and programmes meet CYQAA's accreditation criteria, and to support HEIs in continuous improvement of their institutional structures and activities, and programmes. All types of periodic evaluations are conducted every five years.

The table below provides the number of external evaluations conducted by the agency in the last five years (the numbers in brackets refer to evaluations which ended with the refusal of accreditation).

External QA activity	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
Institutional evaluation	1 + [3]	2	4	1	6 + [1]	18
Institutional evaluation (cross-border)	0	0	0	0	1	1
Departmental evaluation	1	1	19	44	24	89
Programme evaluation:						
Short-cycle programmes	38 + [1]	25 + [1]	33	41	30 + [1]	170
Bachelor's degree programmes*	20 + [6]	19 + [3]	35 + [1]	86 + [1]	45 + [1]	217
Master's degree programmes*	28 + [4]	31 + [5]	43 + [1]	94 + [1]	70 + [2]	279
Integrated Master's programmes	0	1	0	1	4	6
Doctoral degree programmes	7	9	12	38	19	85
Medical programmes	0	1	2	1	1	5
Joint programmes*	0	0	0	1	11	12
E-learning programmes*	7 + [3]	9 + [5]	11 + [1]	26	17 + [1]	80
CBE / Franchised programmes	0	0	1	0	4	5

* The numbers include joint and e-learning programmes.

In addition to evaluations of programmes provided in Cyprus. transnational joint programmes and CBE programmes provided by local HEIs, CYQAA conducts external evaluations abroad (e.g. an ongoing evaluation commissioned by a Latvian HEI).

To support the development of internal QA, CYQAA organises knowledge-sharing seminars for HEIs. It does not provide consultancy services to HEIs or other external stakeholders.

The agency has been a member of ENQA since 2018 and has been included in EQAR since 2019. It is recognised by the World Federation of Medical Education (WFME), and is a full member of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), an affiliate member of the European University Association (EUA), and a member of the European Distance and E-Learning Network (EDEN).

The agency participates in ENQA's General Assemblies and its Working Group on micro-credentials, and in skills development programmes, training and knowledge-sharing seminars or webinars on QA and higher education issues organised by ENQA, QA agencies and organisations involved in higher education (e.g. ENQA Training for Agency Reviewers; ENQA Leadership Development Programme; ENQA/CHAINS, "External Quality Assurance at Level 5 - Time for a common approach?"; ENQA/QAA, "Academic integrity"; AQU Cataluña, A3ES, NOKUT and QQI, "Reflecting on the future of European Quality Assurance"; EUA, "COVID-19 and internal quality assurance"; and EDEN NAP, "Asynchronous approaches to teaching and learning").

CYQAA's FUNDING

CYQAA is fully funded from the State budget. Its budget forms a separate line in the budget of the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth (MESY) and is managed by the agency. The budget increased from €1,355,271 in 2018 to € 2,311,996 in 2019, and varied slightly between €2,189,173 in 2020, €2,004,431 in 2021 and €2,012,765 in 2022. The main expenditure items include external evaluations, fees for members of the Council, travel, accommodation and subsistence costs of its international members and office rent. As the agency's staff are employed and seconded to the agency by the central Government or the MESY, their salaries are paid by the employing bodies.

FINDINGS: COMPLIANCE OF CYQAA 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.

2018 review recommendations

CYQAA should (1) revise its mission statement to incorporate its compliance-assurance aim alongside that of supporting quality improvement in higher education; and (2) devise a detailed two-year activity plan to guide effectively its activities towards the aims set.

Evidence

CYQAA's mission is to safeguard standards and support, through the procedures provided by the relevant legislation and the principles underlying the EHEA, the continuous improvement and upgrading of HEIs and their programmes of study, in order to comply with the ESG and the European policy for mobility and mutual recognition of qualifications. The agency also aims to promote a quality culture within HEIs in Cyprus. In response to the first 2018 review recommendation, the agency included a reference to the safeguarding of standards in its mission statement. (SAR, CYQAA website)

At the time of the previous review, CYQAA had in place its 2016-2020 Strategic Plan and planned its evaluation activities on a six-monthly basis. To implement the second 2018 review recommendation, it adopted a two-year activity plan for the final two years covered by the Strategic Plan.

CYQAA's 2020-2025 Strategic Plan identifies three strategic pillars and related goals: (1) Quality in higher education: evaluation of programmes, departments and institutions; full compliance with the ESG, and with ENQA, EQAR and WFME recommendations; (2) Establishing and sustaining CYQAA as an institution: viable self-reliance (including financial independence); secured and well-developed infrastructure; internationalisation; and efficient administration, management and leadership; and (3) Contribution to society: quality of higher education. These are combined with key performance indicators (KPIs) (e.g. number of evaluations, thematic analysis reports). Evaluation activities are planned on a six-monthly basis; activities such as the organisation of seminars and the preparation of thematic analysis reports are conducted every year; other tasks are planned in meetings of the Council Chair with the staff. Activity reports are prepared on an annual basis. (SAR; Meetings with the Chair, Higher Administrative Officer and Staff; CYQAA website). As the panel learned from the representatives of the MESY, the Strategic Plan is the only published document against which the Ministry can monitor the agency's progress in the implementation of its goals.

CYQAA conducts the following initial and periodic external evaluations – accreditation reviews:

1. Institutional evaluation/accreditation of all HEIs;

2. Departmental evaluation/accreditation for departments of universities only;
3. Programme evaluation/accreditation for programmes provided by all HEIs;
4. Joint programme evaluation/accreditation for programmes provided by all HEIs;
5. Evaluation-accreditation of CBE provided by local HEIs in member states or third-party countries.

Between 2018 and 2022, CYQAA conducted 19 institutional evaluations, 89 departmental evaluations, 762 programme evaluations and 5 CBE evaluations, with the number of evaluations varying by year (see the section 'CYQAA's functions, activities, procedures'). In accordance with the Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education and the Establishment and Operation of an Agency on Related Matters Law, all periodic evaluations are carried out every five years. The sections on ESG 2.1 to 2.7 of this report provide evidence on how the agency conducts its external QA activities in the context of Part 2 of the ESG.

To pursue its mission, CYQAA also (co-)organises knowledge-sharing events for its stakeholders and structured meetings or roundtable discussions with bodies and representatives of HEIs and other stakeholders, including the MESY, the Committee for Education and Culture of the House of Representatives and professional bodies, and contributes to national legislation on higher education. For example, in recent years, the agency organised knowledge sharing seminars on institutional evaluation, student-centred learning, teaching and assessment and distance learning for HEIs, and it plans to hold seminars for HEIs on academic integrity and student assessment in 2023. (SAR) The agency's thematic analysis reports (see ESG 3.4) are another vehicle for building a quality culture in higher education (Online clarification meeting). As the panel learned during the site visit, both the seminars and thematic analysis reports are highly appreciated by HEIs.

The Council, CYQAA's governing body, consists of five academics from public and private universities operating in Cyprus (all three public and two of nine private universities); two international academics from at least two countries (currently, France and Greece); two representatives of professional bodies; and an undergraduate student. Council members are appointed by the Council of Ministers. Academics and professionals are recommended by the minister in charge of higher education who consults the Rectors' Conference and professional bodies respectively; a student representative is nominated by POFEN, which represents students vis-a-vis various institutions, including the Parliament. (Law; SAR) The representatives of the MESY and POFEN whom the panel met were satisfied with the level of their involvement in the agency's activities, although the students could not provide any details about their cooperation with the agency aside from their representative being a member of the CYQAA Council.

The survey conducted by CYQAA in 2022 as part of its self-assessment shows that most of the respondent HEIs were satisfied with the level of their involvement in its work (SAR, Annex I). However, while acknowledging that the Council ensures fair and equal treatment of all HEIs, the heads of HEIs and the MESY representatives whom the panel met were unanimous in their view that the composition of the Council should be expanded to include representatives of colleges to reflect the diversity of the higher education landscape and pursue a more flexible approach which recognises the specificity of each type of HEI. Private universities would like to have a more proportionate representation on the Council. The Council could additionally include employers representing non-regulated professions. As regards possible involvement of private colleges in its governance, the agency pointed to the fact that heads of private colleges are not academics, whereas Council members representing HEIs should have an academic background.

External Evaluation Committees (EECs), which conduct evaluations, consist of international academic experts, national building, infrastructure and student services experts, students, and practitioners representing regulated professions (Law; SAR; Written pre-visit clarifications). The Council and the stakeholders interviewed agree that students experts should come not only from public universities, as is currently the case, but also from the other types of HEIs. The stakeholders also believe that

employers representing non-regulated professions could be usefully involved in EECs. (For peer review experts, see ESG 2.4).

CYQAA's 2022 survey indicates that most of the respondent HEIs consider the agency's goals and objectives to be clear and have a high level of trust in its external QA procedures. The representatives of HEIs whom the panel met emphasised that the agency's external QA and knowledge-sharing activities had built mutual trust and greatly contributed to the enhancement of institutional policies and practices and the quality of education, and to creating a quality culture at HEIs where the academic community is now more engaged in, and supportive of, both external and internal QA. This is all reflected in higher positions of Cypriot HEIs in international rankings and their success in attracting increasing numbers of international students, which – along with the competitive pressure and labour market expectations – are motivating factors for HEIs to invest further effort in internal QA and perform well in external evaluations. For the professional bodies issuing licences for regulated professions, the impact of the agency's QA activities can also be seen in better quality of graduates. The national authorities appreciate CYQAA's attitude towards HEIs that is both demanding and supportive, and its contribution to pursing the Government's priorities of high-quality education and internationalisation.

Analysis

The panel confirms that CYQAA conducts its external QA activities on a regular basis. For the panel's comments on the agency's compliance with the standards of Part 2 of the ESG, see sections ESG 2.1 to 2.7 of this report.

The panel considers that the agency's mission statement, as revised to address the first 2018 review recommendation, accurately reflects the dual compliance and enhancement objective of its external QA activities and clearly defines its relationship with HEIs. The panel also confirms that the mission statement is published on the CYQAA website.

The 2018-2020 activity plan adopted by the agency to implement the second 2018 review recommendation included clear objectives, activities and timeframes for their implementation, although it mainly focused on good practices and areas for improvement highlighted in the 2018 review report.

The SAR and the site visit interviews clearly demonstrate that CYQAA carries forward the goals set in its mission statement through its external QA, knowledge-sharing and other activities, and that its contribution to quality enhancement and building a quality culture is valued by the stakeholders in Cyprus. However, the standard expects agencies to demonstrate how their goals are translated into daily activities, CYQAA's 2020-2025 Strategic Plan is rather generic, with no specific activities and clear timeframes included to explain how and when the goals will be achieved, aside from the indication that the progress towards the KPIs will be reviewed annually and after three and five years. At the time of the review, the panel did not see evidence of a public, annual corporate or activity plan that operationalises the Strategic Plan, includes specific actions, due dates, target values of the KPIs to be achieved, responsible individuals, and, ideally, resources needed, and that could be monitored and used, for instance, as a basis for the assignment of staff responsibilities and for the purposes of public accountability. The publication and dissemination of such a plan would be a very useful way of indicating the agency's progress in delivering on its goals to its wide stakeholder base. Recorded monthly meetings of the Chair with staff could be part of the agency's annual planning procedure.

The MESY has a key role in the appointment of the CYQAA Council, and, in the panel's view, its greater involvement would further undermine the agency's independence (for related comments, see ESG 3.3). The Council is representative of the universities, including both public and private ones, students and the regulated professions. However, the panel agrees with the representatives of HEIs and the MESY interviewed that the current arrangements provide for limited involvement of the private HEIs and the many public and private colleges (the latter representing almost one-fourth of the student

population) in the agency's governance and / or external QA activities. Engagement with a wider student base outside of the public universities for the recruitment of student experts for EECs would further enhance the relevance of external evaluation outcomes, as well as developing students' expertise in QA, and encouraging their greater involvement in internal QA, across the higher education sector. The expansion of engagement with the world of work beyond the regulated professions would also greatly enhance the work of the agency. The panel is aware that any change in the composition of the Council would require an amendment to the law. Considering the current legal constraints, the agency could choose to establish other consultative structures that could meet on a frequent and structured basis to inform its work and disseminate its outcomes,

The panel gathered from its interviews that although CYQAA's governance structure is not yet fully representative of the higher education sector, this does not undermine its impartiality and fairness in taking accreditation decisions. All of the panel's meetings also demonstrate that the agency has gained a high reputation for its professionalism and is perceived as a trustworthy organisation. Its expertise and reputation are further enhanced by extensive involvement of international experts in the Council and all EECs (see ESG 2.4). As the agency has attracted experts from internationally renowned institutions, HEIs are benchmarked against high international standards, which is appreciated by the stakeholders.

Panel commendations

1. The panel commends CYQAA for the extensive involvement of international experts in its governance structure and all external evaluation committees.

Panel recommendations

1. CYQAA should adopt and publish annual activity plans operationalising its multi-annual strategic plan to demonstrate to its stakeholders how its goals are translated into actions and provide a sound basis for monitoring progress towards its goals and key performance indicators.
2. CYQAA should widen the stakeholder base that it formally engages with to ensure that all the higher education institutions, including the colleges and their students, are involved in its governance and evaluation processes. For the related recommendation regarding student experts involved in evaluation processes, see ESG 2.4.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

1. The panel encourages CYQAA to expand its engagement with the world of work and involve employers representing non-regulated professions in its governance. For the related recommendation regarding the involvement of practitioners representing non-regulated professions in evaluation processes, see ESG 2.4.

Panel conclusion: partially 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.

Evidence

CYQAA was established by the Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education and the Establishment and Operation of an Agency on Related Matters Law of 2015, as subsequently amended (hereafter referred to as the QAA Law). The QAA Law describes the agency as the only national QA agency operating in the Republic of Cyprus. It sets out its responsibilities and operational framework, including funding for its activities as forming part of the budget of the ministry in charge of education. The Law also requires that HEIs undergo external evaluations conducted by CYQAA and refers to the Registers whereinto the Ministry enters private HEIs and their programmes based on the agency's accreditation decisions. The QAA Law also allows CYQAA to conduct evaluations in other countries.

The SAR also states that the:

> "so-called "Higher Education, Planning, Evaluation, Accreditation and Coordination Council (YODAK)" is an illegal body operating under the purported "Law" of the so-called "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" (TRNC), which, pursuant to the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions and international law, is an illegal entity not recognised by the international community, except Turkey. Thus, neither YODAK nor its accreditation decisions may be recognised by the international community or internationally recognised educational organisations. CYQAA does not conduct external QA activities in the so-called TRNC."

Analysis

Based on the evidence collected, the panel confirms that CYQAA has been established by law and is recognised for its work by the Government of the Republic of Cyprus, HEIs and other stakeholders. As noted under ESG 3.1, all stakeholders are well aware of, and extremely supportive of the work and outputs of the agency and believe strongly that it contributes significantly to the improvement of the quality and standing of higher education in Cyprus both at home and overseas.

Panel conclusion: 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.

2018 review recommendations

CYQAA should (1) discuss with its stakeholders how the procedure for the appointment and dismissal of the Council can be amended so that it is not perceived as providing space for interference of the national authorities; (2) be fully separated from the Ministry of Education and Culture (currently, the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth) in organisational terms, including the staff recruitment process and financial services.

Evidence

The QAA Law states that CYQAA "shall be independent to the extent required to do its work autonomously and to exercise independently its functions so that its conclusions and recommendations

contained in the evaluation reports shall not be influenced by third parties concerned such as higher education institutions, ministries or others."

For the composition of the Council, CYQAA's governing body, see ESG 3.1. Council members are appointed by the Council of Ministers; a student member is nominated by POFEN, and academics and professionals are recommended by the Minister in charge of higher education who consults the Rectors' Conference and professional bodies. The QAA Law sets qualification requirements for academic members (possessing the rank of Professor or Professor Emeritus; having experience in university management and, if possible, in QA). The procedure for the appointment of the Council, involving the competent minister and the Council of Ministers, is a standard procedure for appointments to public positions in the Republic of Cyprus (Meetings with the Council and its Chair). The Chair of the Council is elected by its members. Members can be dismissed before the end of the term by the Council of Ministers, upon the recommendation from the Minister, for reasons specified in the QAA Law: failure to disclose a conflict of interest, a prolonged illness, absence or behaviour which is improper or incompatible with the mission or goals of the agency.

The QAA Law states that Council members should act independently and objectively and refrain from promoting the interests of the institution where they come from or any other institution. They are required to declare, before each meeting, any conflict of interest regarding a matter to be discussed and to recuse themselves from the discussion of, and voting on, such a matter. Failure to comply with this obligation provides grounds for the dismissal of a Council member. Council members sign the Code of Deontology and Absence of Conflict of Interest. (QAA Law; SAR; Meeting with the Council)

CYQAA's Higher Administrative Officer and Administrative Assistants, and Education Officers, who come from the primary and secondary education system, are employed by the central Government and the MESY, respectively, and seconded to the agency. Staff apply under an open call published by the MESY; the agency has additional selection criteria (e.g. English language, interpersonal and organisational skills), and the CYQAA Council Chair is consulted before a secondment is approved. When the agency needs additional staff, the Chair submits a request to the MESY. Staff sign the agency's Code of Conduct and Ethics of Civil Servants. (SAR; Written pre-visit clarifications; Online clarification meeting; Meetings with the Council Chair and Staff)

Pursuant to the QAA Law, CYQAA's budget is drafted by its Council, submitted to the Minister and approved by the House of Representatives, and forms a separate line in the MESY budget. Fees charged to HEIs for external evaluations are deposited in the Consolidated Fund of the Republic of Cyprus. The Council has full authority to manage the agency's budget and the MESY cannot make any changes in the approved budget. The MESY provides premises and accounting services to the agency. (Online and pre-visit onsite clarification meetings)

The QAA Law prescribes the main stages of evaluation processes (see ESG 2.3) and the categories of experts to be involved in EECs for each type of evaluation (ESG 2.4). It states that CYQAA independently adopts detailed evaluation methodologies and procedures, recruits external experts and appoints EECs. Evaluation methodologies are adopted by the Council. International academic and national building, infrastructure and student services experts are recruited directly by the agency; students and practitioners representing regulated professions to be included in its pool of experts are proposed by the public universities and professional bodies respectively (SAR). The inclusion of other experts such as employers representing non-regulated professions would require an amendment to the QAA Law (Onsite pre-visit clarification meeting). The Council Chair appoints EECs and experts who support the Council in considering appeals (see ESG 2.7). Every expert involved in external QA activities signs the Statutory Declaration confirming the Absence of any Conflict of Interest. The experts interviewed by the panel emphasised that the agency takes great care to ensure that EEC members have no conflict of interest. (SAR; Online clarification meeting; Meetings with experts).

Pursuant to the QAA Law, the Council is the decision-making body in external QA processes and its accreditation decisions do not require endorsement by any other body. Decisions are taken by a simple majority vote of the members present, and in the case of a tied vote, the Chair or the person chairing the meeting has a casting vote. As the panel learned from the Council, in practice, decisions are taken by consensus after long discussions and there has been no need for voting up to this point.

The SAR states that in the formal consultations that CYQAA held to carry out the first 2018 review recommendations, none of the stakeholders expressed concerns about possible interference from the national authorities with the agency's activities through the procedure for the appointment of the Council. Pursuant to the amendments that the agency drafted in 2019 to address the second recommendation, it would have legal capacity, be authorised to acquire, purchase, possess and manage property, have its own budget, bank account and financial services, and recruit staff; and fees for external evaluations would be included in its budget as income. The amendments also provide for the position of Director General as part of the agency's management structure. At the time of the panel's site visit, the amendments required "the final touch" before being submitted to the Council of Ministers and the House of Representatives. Approval had been delayed by lengthy legislative procedures, changes in the position of the minister in charge of education, requests from government bodies to include additional provisions, and priority given to amendments allowing the agency to conduct online site visits as part of evaluations during the Covid-19 pandemic. (SAR; Online clarification meeting; Meetings with the national authorities and the Higher Administrative Officer)

CYQAA's internal stakeholders assured the panel that they act fully independently, and emphasised that they strictly adhere to the principle of impartiality set out in the QAA Law and the codes of conduct signed, and that there is no interference from a third party in the agency's activities. CYQAA is also perceived by the MESY as acting independently, although its representatives whom the panel met are aware that the amendments to the QAA Law are a major step to ensure the agency's full operational independence. The survey conducted by CYQAA as part of its self-assessment shows that most of the respondent HEIs consider the agency to be independent in organisational and operational terms and regarding outcomes of its evaluation processes. As far as the heads of HEIs interviewed were concerned, the agency is "fully independent academically" in its external evaluation processes, and largely independent in operational terms, and the amendments to the QAA Law would provide further safeguards in this respect.

Analysis

Organisational independence

The QAA Law and the Code of Deontology signed by members of the Council, which clearly defines the principles of impartiality and no-conflict-of-interest, provide a solid basis for safeguarding CYQAA's organisational independence. It was also clear to the panel in the meeting with the Council that its members are well aware that they are required to act in their personal capacity rather than as representatives of their institutions or any other third party.

While the Minister in charge of education and the Council of Ministers have a key role in the appointment of Council members, the panel believes that this is balanced by the involvement of other key stakeholders in the consultations held by the Minister, and none of the stakeholders interviewed expressed concerns about the national authorities using their position as leverage. The panel also understands that the procedure is well embedded in the constitutional order of the Republic of Cyprus and thus perceived as transparent. Ideally, the Minister would also consult the stakeholders about the dismissal of a Council member before the end of their term of office. However, the panel does not see any likelihood in the national authorities exerting influence on the agency through the current arrangement involving only the Minister and the Council of Ministers as the Law specifies clear-cut cases in which a Council member can be dismissed, and these could hardly be open to subjective interpretation.

The organisational arrangements provide for a sound distribution of power within the Council, with no single member having a dominant position. The Chair is elected by Council members, and decisions of the Council are taken collectively. The panel notes that aside from taking decisions in day-to-day management and being the head of staff (see "CYQAA Organisation/Structure"), the Chair appoints EECs upon the suggestion of the Education Officers. However, it believes that the risk of the Chair exerting in this way undue influence on the outcome of an evaluation is minimised by the safeguards in place for the impartiality of an EEC (see below) and the Council taking collectively an accreditation decision.

Operational independence

CYQAA responded swiftly to the 2018 review recommendations. The amendments to the QAA Law drafted in 2019 address, in the panel's view, the main constraints on its operational independence. The panel understands that the legal changes are well in train, and strongly urges the political system to complete them as quickly as possible so that the agency can be put on a more solid footing.

Currently, the key issue is that the agency cannot hire its own staff, relying on secondments from the central Government and the MESY, even though the Council Chair is involved in the recruitment process. The system of using staff seconded from the primary and secondary school system is also a somewhat narrow staffing base, and as explained under ESG 3.5, does not provide staff with the possibility of career advancement within the agency. It also makes long-term planning more challenging. Furthermore, the current arrangements blur the line between governance (oversight, strategic and financial planning, decision-making) and management (day-to-day running) insofar as the Chair combines both functions and, at the same time, the Higher Administrative Officer is responsible for the coordination of the agency's activities (see the section "CYQAA Organisation/Structure"). The ability to hire its own staff would allow the agency to establish a more recognisable management system with a senior executive responsible for leading and managing staff and a more appropriate balance of governance and management between the Council and the executive.

While CYQAA manages its own budget line as part of the MESY budget, the agency is not allowed to use it to hire additional staff when needed, and relies on the MESY for the provision of premises and accounting services. The provision to the agency of a full-fledged budget covering all types of its operating expenses would also allow for the better and more structured deployment of resources between evaluation activities and the other work of the agency in the areas of thematic analysis, seminars, staff development and wider stakeholder engagement. The current arrangements also make it difficult for the agency to transparently show how it deploys its resources and how the cost of its activities match the fees charged to HEIs. The panel understands from its discussions during the visit that this causes some concern on the institutional side about the cost of evaluation processes.

The evidence collected clearly demonstrates that CYQAA is fully independent in defining its detailed evaluation methodologies and in selecting experts for EECs within the limits set by the QAA Law. However, like the 2018 review panel, the panel considers that the provisions of the QAA Law regarding evaluation methodologies are overly prescriptive. In particular, the prescription of the composition of EECs places some restrictions on the agency's ability to select EECs from a wider stakeholder base, including, for example, non-regulated professions (for related comments, see ESG 3.1). While students and practitioners for the pool of experts are proposed by the universities and professional bodies rather than being recruited directly by the agency, the criteria are clearly defined and published (see ESG 2.4), and the agency takes the final responsibility for the selection and appointment of EEC members.

Independence of formal outcomes

The panel considers that the involvement of international experts in each EEC, particularly important for the small-size higher education system in Cyprus, the principle of no-conflict-of-interest strictly observed by the agency in the appointment of EECs and the related declaration signed by the experts provide effective mechanisms for preventing any third-party influence on EECs' findings and conclusions in external evaluations. The QAA Law clearly states that the final responsibility for accreditation decisions lies with the Council, and, in the panel's view, the Council's independence and impartiality in decision-making is safeguarded by the arrangements discussed in the context of organisational independence. The panel found no evidence to suggest otherwise in its discussions with the representatives of the MESY and HEIs.

Overall, the issues regarding CYQAA's operational independence need to be urgently resolved, and this is recognised by the agency and its stakeholders. However, the evidence collected indicates that these issues have no major impact on the agency's independence in its external QA activities, and the panel understands that this view is shared by the stakeholders.

Panel recommendations

1. Based on the changes proposed by CYQAA, the Law setting the framework for the agency's activities should be urgently amended to ensure that it is fully separated from the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth in operational terms and, in particular, is able to recruit its own staff and manage its own full-fledged budget covering all of its operating expenses.
2. CYQAA should propose amendments to the Law that would allow it greater autonomy in modifying its external evaluation methodologies in response to developments in higher education and the feedback collected from its stakeholders.

Panel conclusion: partially 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.

2018 review recommendation

CYQAA should introduce the practice of analysing systematically the material collected in its external quality assurance activities and publishing regularly its findings to provide inputs to national policies, support institutions in the development of internal quality assurance and aid its own reflection on its external quality assurance processes.

Evidence

To address the 2018 recommendation, CYQAA has published the following thematic analysis reports since 2019:

1. Master's programme evaluation: Trends and Dominant Issues, 2017-2018, (2019) (based on external evaluation reports for 41 programme evaluations).
2. Master e-learning programme evaluation: Trends and Dominant Issues, 2016-2019, (2019) (26 programme evaluations).
3. Colleges' Short-Cycle Programme Evaluation: Trends and Dominant Issues, 2017-2018 (2019) (42 programme evaluations).

4. E-learning Master's programme evaluation: Trends and Dominant Issues, 2019-2020, (2020) (32 programme evaluations).
5. PhD programme evaluation, 2015-2020 (2021) (31 programme evaluations).
6. Student assessment practices in the framework of departmental evaluations, 2018-2021, (2022) (60 departmental evaluations).

Regular publication of thematic analysis reports has become an established practice at CYQAA, with the target number of thematic analysis reports to be produced (and, in fact, already achieved) included as a KPI in the Strategic Plan. The agency has also appointed two Education Officers to analyse findings from external evaluations on a regular basis. At the end of each academic year or semester, Education Officers present a report on initial findings to the Council for reflection and further elaboration. Topics for reports are chosen by the Council, based on recurring issues identified in external evaluation reports (EERs). HEIs can suggest topics, but the agency has not received any specific request yet. Reports are published on CYQAA's website; all HEIs are informed about the publications via the agency's newsletter and announcements on its website. (SAR; Strategic Plan; Online clarification meeting; Meeting with the Council Chair) The international experts interviewed by the panel expressed an interest in meta-evaluation findings but were not aware that the agency produced thematic reports.

Based on the reports, CYQAA has refined some quality indicators for external evaluations (e.g. maximum workload established for full- and part-time staff at HEIs; study guides to be prepared by HEIs for e-learning programmes) and highlights specific criteria or indicators in its briefings for EECs. It also uses findings from its analysis to plan knowledge-sharing seminars for HEIs and structured meetings with its stakeholders (see ESG 3.1). (SAR; Meeting with the SAR Group)

The survey conducted by CYQAA as part of its self-assessment in 2022 indicates that the thematic reports have contributed to reflection and improvement in QA policies and processes at most of the respondent HEIs (SAR, Annex I). For the representatives of HEIs whom the panel met, the thematic reports provide a good overview of lessons learnt which are used for quality improvements. The new team in the MESY whom the panel met intends to use the reports in policy development, and suggested some topics for future reports such as internationalisation, the link between programmes and labour market needs, quality culture, and micro-credentials.

Analysis

It is very gratifying to see the progress made in this area by the agency with the publication of several thematic analysis reports and the dissemination of their findings in seminars for HEIs. It is also clear to the panel that thematic analysis has become an integral part of CYQAA's regular activities, and despite the heavy workload of its staff, it has the resources required to carry on with its research work as planned (see also ESG 3.5).

The panel has read all six thematic reports. The agency invested impressive effort to produce reports that are based on a thorough analysis of key aspects addressed in the evaluation criteria, clearly identify strengths and areas for improvement, indicating trends, and, where possible, improvements made by HEIs in response to recommendations in EERs. Both the bigger picture and numerous specific examples that the reports provide can feed into national policy development and enhancement of institutional policies and practices, and the panel gathers from its site visit meetings that the reports are very much welcomed by CYQAA's stakeholders. It is also evident to the panel that the agency uses findings from the reports to improve its evaluation processes.

While the thematic reports are widely promoted among HEIs, the panel believes that they would be very useful for, in particular, international academic experts in EECs in understanding better the local context (see ESG 2.4). They could be part of the document package that CYQAA provides to EECs.

The Council is well-placed to identify topics for analysis based on overall findings from external evaluations; in planning its future thematic analyses, it might, nevertheless, benefit from suggestions put forward by its stakeholders that reflect their national or institutional policy priorities.

Panel commendations

1. The agency has invested impressive effort in producing thematic analyses reports that are effectively integrated into its regular activities.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

1. CYQAA could distribute thematic analysis reports to its experts as a useful source of information about the broader context of their external evaluations.
2. The panel encourages CYQAA to use its regular meetings with the stakeholders, including students, as an opportunity to seek their inputs in planning its future thematic analyses and identifying their topics.

Panel conclusion: compliant

ESG 3.5 RESOURCES

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

Evidence

Pursuant to the QAA Law, CYQAA should have sufficient financial resources to carry out its activities. The Law obliges the MESY to provide to the agency suitable premises, adequate human resources and technical support, and to cover its administrative operating costs.

CYQAA is fully funded from the State budget. Its main expenditure items include costs of external evaluations, fees for members of the Council and travel, accommodation and subsistence costs of its international members, and office rent. Salaries of staff are paid by the central Government or the MESY (see ESG 3.3). The agency's budget increased from 1.35 m EUR in 2018 to 2.31 m EUR in 2019, and varied slightly between 2.19 m EUR in 2020, 2.00 m EUR in 2021 and 2.01 m EUR in 2022. Between 2018 and 2022, the agency spent between 30% to 51% of its budget, depending on the year. (SAR) As the Council Chair explained to the panel, the agency proposes a sufficient budget to avoid a situation where it has committed to more seminars and evaluation applications and potentially run short of money. This is considered acceptable practice by both the MESY and the agency, although in the budget proposal, such a large surplus is not accounted for.

The Council is supported by 11 staff members, including the Higher Administrative Officer, who coordinates the agency's activities and acts as Secretary to the Council, nine Education Officers, who coordinate external evaluations, and two Administrative Assistants. Extensive use of ICT for remote work during the Covid-19 pandemic increased work efficiency, but the current number of staff still poses a challenge for the agency in view of the high number of evaluations carried out and its plans to carry on with development activities. The arrangement whereby staff are not employed on a permanent basis (see ESG 3.3) is identified as a weakness in the SWOT analysis, and was highlighted by the staff whom the panel met as a barrier to career advancement. However, most key staff members have worked at the agency for at least five years, and apply for the extension of their secondment

every year. Most of them also indicated their intention to apply for a permanent job once the amendments to the QAA Law are passed (see ESG 3.3). While the workload is heavy, the staff appreciate the collegial spirit in the team and ample learning and development opportunities that the agency offers. (SAR; Online clarification meeting; Meeting with Staff)

As stated in the SAR, more than half of the staff have previous experience in education management, and all staff have gained substantial experience in QA through their involvement in external evaluations in the last five years. Staff have participated in skills development programmes and seminars on higher education and QA issues organised by European QA bodies (see "CYQAA's functions, activities, procedures"), the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute and the Cyprus Academy of Public Administration, and the agency itself (e.g. seminar on student-centred learning, teaching and assessment). The international experts and the representatives of HEIs interviewed by the panel were very complimentary about the dedication and professionalism of the agency's staff.

Analysis

With a significant portion of the budget unspent each year, CYQAA clearly has more than sufficient financial resources available for its external QA, development and knowledge-sharing activities. Its work is highly appreciated by the MESY and the House of Representatives as instrumental in carrying forward the national policy priorities (see ESG 3.1), and the panel found no indication in the meeting with the representatives of the national authorities that they were planning to cut the agency's budget in the coming years.

While the staff clearly work hard, the panel found no evidence that CYQAA is unable to deliver its evaluation load or to carry out thematic analyses, organise enhancement events or provide its staff with development opportunities. It is also reassuring that despite the heavy workload and constraints on career advancement, the agency has retained its core staff team over the years and is likely to continue to benefit from their expertise when the amended QAA Law allows for the possibility of permanent employment in the agency.

However, further to its comments under ESG 3.3, the panel reiterates that the agency needs to be able to recruit its own staff and have its own full-fledged budget where it can clearly account for the costs of its activities, the cost of its human and physical resources and how the fees and income it receives match the cost of its activities. Thus, the panel would strongly urge the necessary legal changes to be made to permit the agency to be established on a more secure and permanent basis for the betterment of higher education in Cyprus. This issue is taken into consideration in the panel's conclusion and addressed in its recommendation under ESG 3.3.

Panel commendations

1. CYQAA has highly qualified, dedicated and professional staff who clearly enjoy their work and are held in high esteem by the higher education institutions and experts that they work with.

Panel conclusion: 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.

2018 review recommendation

CYQAA should rely increasingly on formal rather than informal mechanisms for feedback collection and improve its current mechanism for collecting feedback after each evaluation (a response submitted by each institution) so that institutions are explicitly requested to provide feedback and do so in a structured way.

Evidence

A framework for CYQAA's internal QA and professional conduct is set by the Quality Policy Statement, the Gender Equality Policy, the Privacy Policy, and the codes and / or no-conflict-of-interest declarations signed by Council members, staff and experts (see ESG 3.3). The Quality Policy Statement affirms CYQAA's commitment to maintain high quality, professional standards and integrity in its work, respect the principles of tolerance and non-discrimination, and carry out its activities in line with the ESG. It also identifies key internal QA mechanisms, including the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and feedback collection mechanisms. In its Gender Equality Policy, the agency undertakes to ensure, insofar as practicable, gender balance in its activities and the composition of EECs. (SAR; website).

The Higher Administrative Officer is the agency's IQA coordinator. Each staff member is responsible for the quality of their work in accordance with the CAF. The Council meets at least once a month to review the agency's activities, discuss the feedback collected from staff and external stakeholders and take formal decisions on follow-up action to be taken. (SAR; Meetings with the Council and its Chair, and the Higher Administrative Officer)

Feedback from the staff is collected in regular meetings with the Chair which are held once a month or every two months and where the minutes are taken, with details about any follow-up action to be taken. As the Chair has an open-door policy, the staff can also discuss any issues and make suggestions on a more informal basis. Most of their suggestions for improvement are taken on board by the Chair or the Council. (Meetings with the Council, Higher Administrative Officer and Staff)

In response to the 2018 review recommendation, CYQAA has introduced feedback surveys for HEIs and EECs, both conducted after each evaluation, and structured meetings with its stakeholders to gather their feedback (see ESG 3.1). The questionnaire for HEIs covers, among other things, the quality of the evaluation process; evaluation methodology; CYQAA's decision-making; information on its website; interaction with the agency; and performance of an EEC. The questionnaire for EECs addresses communication with the evaluation coordinator; evaluation methodology; relevance of information in the HEI's application; and briefing and guidelines for experts. (SAR, Annexes II-III)

To assist staff in their professional development, CYQAA has in place a procedure where experienced staff members mentor new colleagues, and provides various staff development opportunities (see "CYQAA's functions, activities, procedures", and ESG 3.5). Experts included in the agency's pool should meet specific criteria. All EECs receive written guidelines and have a briefing before a site visit as part of an external evaluation. In 2019, the agency organised training workshops for students and building and technological infrastructure experts included in its pool of experts to enhance their understanding of the evaluation criteria. (See ESG 2.4). (SAR; Meetings with Staff and Experts)

The performance of EEC members is evaluated in post-evaluation surveys completed by HEIs and by evaluation coordinators in their meetings with the Chair. Staff are evaluated by a panel involving representatives from the government or the MESY department that has seconded them and the Council Chair. The performance of Education Officers during external evaluations is also assessed by HEIs and EECs in post-evaluation surveys (questions referring to the coordination of an evaluation process, communication with the agency or the responsible officer and the quality of the briefing provided to an EEC by the responsible officer), Until now there has not been a case where a staff member did not deliver an expected standard of work. Several experts have been excluded for professional

misconduct (e.g. behaviour deemed as disrespectful; comments deemed to be inappropriate). (Online clarification meeting; Meetings with the Higher Administrative Officer and Staff).

The 2022 survey that CYQAA conducted among HEIs as part of its self-assessment shows that most of the respondents consider persons involved in CYQAA's activities to be competent and acting professionally and ethically. The international experts and the representatives of HEIs whom the panel met spoke highly of the Education Officers who are very well prepared to do their job.

In the post-evaluation surveys, most of the HEIs and EEC members rated highly or very highly all aspects covered by the questionnaires (SAR, Annexes II-III). The internal QA officers from HEIs and the experts whom the panel met complimented the agency for its responsiveness to feedback, constructive dialogue and culture of continuous improvement. For example, in response to their feedback, it regularly refined its evaluation criteria and improved its application forms for HEIs and EER templates to better address the specificity of each type of evaluation; it is now developing an electronic system for all functions related to the evaluation process (submission and evaluation of applications, document creation and storage, and meeting management), which will also make the drafting of EERs much easier for EECs.

The experts whom the panel met had not received feedback on their performance as EEC members, and would like to be informed about the outcomes of evaluations in which they were involved, and follow-up action taken by HEIs on the recommendations made in their EERs. POFEN would like to receive lists of students involved in EECs (provided the students have given their consent for this information to be so provided) so that it can contact them and gather information about problems relevant to students which were identified in evaluations.

Internal QA of the work performed by other agencies

CYQAA does not subcontract its external QA or other activities, but it may recognise evaluation decisions taken by EQAR-registered agencies. Pursuant to the QAA Law, except for their first institutional, departmental or programme evaluation, HEIs in Cyprus may choose an EQAR-registered agency for external evaluation provided that the HEI concerned has obtained prior consent from CYQAA and the other agency only conducts an evaluation and does not grant accreditation. The accreditation decision is taken by CYQAA based on the outcomes of an external evaluation conducted by the other agency. The Law also provides for CYQAA to conduct an additional evaluation if it is not satisfied with the evaluation of the other agency. The recognition procedure has not been tested yet (Onsite pre-visit clarification meeting).

CYQAA uses evaluation documents issued by other QA bodies and submitted by applicant HEIs in a desk-review process where it checks compliance with the conditions set by the QAA Law for the provision of CBE (a franchised programme) by a foreign HEI before the HEI may commence a given programme in Cyprus. The Law requires, for example, that the applicant HEI should be recognised and authorised to provide the programme and award the related qualification, and the programme and the qualification should be accredited, in the home country; the qualification should confer the same rights in the home country and Cyprus. CYQAA examines the evaluation documents, and documents provided by the HEI concerned, which provide details about the programme (e.g. its structure, and course timetable; teaching and learning facilities; student admission, assessment and graduation arrangements; qualifications of teaching staff). Based on its desk-review, the agency issues a document confirming that the conditions are fulfilled, and the HEI is permitted to provide a given programme and award the related qualification. Subsequently, graduates apply to the competent national body in Cyprus (KYSATS) for the recognition of their qualifications.

Analysis

The panel welcomes the developments since the last review in terms of the use of post-evaluation surveys of HEIs, as recommended, and, additionally, of EEC members about their satisfaction with the conduct of the agency's evaluation processes. Both questionnaires are designed so that the agency can gather meaningful feedback for further improvement of its processes. In the context of feedback collection, the panel agrees with the 2018 review panel that regular formal meetings, rather than, for example, a survey as the mechanism for internal feedback collection are fully sufficient for a small agency like CYQAA.

The panel found that CYQAA acts in a professional and ethical manner. The agency has in place policies, codes and declarations and a set of arrangements and mechanisms (selection criteria, guidelines and briefing for experts; staff training; EEC and staff performance appraisal; feedback collection) that work well in practice to ensure that the persons involved in its activities observe its principles and standards. As the panel noted under ESG 3.1 and 3.3, the agency's professionalism and integrity are highly valued by its stakeholders. CYQAA's procedure for the recognition of other QA agencies' evaluation outcomes is even stricter than expected under ESG 3.6 and EQAR's Guidelines on ESG 3.6 as it may recognise only decisions taken by EQAR-registered agencies, and even in such cases it may conduct an additional evaluation to be satisfied that its ESG-based accreditation criteria are met. The procedure for the assessment of conditions for the provision of CBE allows the agency to conduct a thorough review within the limits set by the QAA Law, and based on a sample of assessment reports examined, the panel confirms that the procedure is rigorously followed.

The panel also found evidence that the agency is open to suggestions and acts upon the feedback collected for its continuous improvement, and this is truly appreciated by its stakeholders. The panel believes, however, that some further work needs to be done to close the feedback loop to EECs, particularly to student members, on their performance in external evaluations and on the action taken by the agency and HEIs to follow up on recommendations in EERs. As regards the latter issue, the panel gathers from the discussion with the experts that they are not aware of the follow-up stage of the evaluation process as, in contractual terms, their involvement ends with the submission of a report (or, if necessary, written feedback provided on an HEI's response to an EER; for reports, see ESG 2.6). The panel also supports POFEN's idea to be briefed by willing EEC student members about developments at HEIs; and since a POFEN-nominated student is a member of the CYQAA Council, the panel suggests that this could be a matter for discussion at a monthly meeting of this body.

The panel understands that CYQAA's internal QA system is based on the mechanisms discussed above and the CAF. It found little evidence that the agency's internal QA processes give due consideration to its internal governance. There does not appear to be a mechanism for the evaluation of the effectiveness of the balance between its governance and management (for related comments, see ESG 3.3). Good governance practice suggests that evaluations of this relationship should be conducted on a periodic basis.

Panel commendations

1. CYQAA has in place effective mechanisms for collecting and acting upon stakeholder feedback in a continuous effort to enhance its performance.

Panel recommendations

1. CYQAA should close the feedback loop to external evaluation committees on their performance and on the follow-up to their recommendations in evaluation reports.
2. CYQAA should put in place a mechanism for regular evaluation of the effectiveness of its internal governance.

Panel conclusion: 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

Following its first external review, CYQAA became a member of ENQA in 2018 and was entered on EQAR in 2019. The present review is conducted to support the agency's application for the renewal of its ENQA membership and its registration on EQAR.

CYQAA's Mission and Quality Policy Statement affirm that it seeks to conduct its activities in line with the ESG and the SAR confirms the agency's commitment to undergo a periodic ENQA review. In the SAR and its discussion with the panel, the SAR Group emphasised that its ENQA membership and EQAR registration had become the cornerstone of the agency's national and international standing and enhanced its involvement in national policy making and opportunities for knowledge sharing and networking at European level and for improvement of its activities.

Analysis

It is clear to the panel from the evidence collected that CYQAA is strongly motivated to undergo a cyclical external review to demonstrate its compliance with the ESG, and the current review fulfils the requirement in the standard.

As noted in the relevant sections of this review report, CYQAA has carried out most of the 2018 review recommendations and suggestions. It is somewhat disappointing, however, that some key recommendations and suggestions that the panel makes in this report echo those made in the 2018 report. In particular, the 2018 review recommendations regarding the agency's independence (ESG 3.3) and appeals procedure (ESG 2.7) have yet to be implemented, although the panel is aware that the agency acted promptly to draft amendments to the law to address the independence issue, and there has been a considerable delay in the legislative process that is beyond its control. While the agency adopted a two-year activity plan to operationalise its previous strategic plan as recommended by the 2018 review panel, it does not follow that recommendation to devise annual activity plans for its current strategic plan (ESG 3.1). The panel also believes that the agency could have given more consideration to the suggestions of the 2018 review panel to expand the composition of the Council to make it fully representative of the higher education sector (ESG 3.1) and the student base from which experts are selected for EECs (ESG 2.4), involve employers representing non-regulated professions in EECs (ESG 2.4), and eliminate any unnecessary overlap in the criteria for the evaluation processes (ESG 2.2).

Panel conclusion: compliant

ESG PART 2: EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Note from the review panel: In addition to the external QA processes addressed by this review, the ToR for the 2018 review included the assessment of conditions for the provision of CBE (franchised

programmes) by foreign HEIs. This process is limited by the QAA Law to checking compliance with formal conditions (see ESG 3.6 above), does not aim to evaluate, assure or improve quality, but to ensure that the programme to be provided and the qualification to be awarded are not of a lower standard than in the foreign HEI's home country, and relies on external programme evaluations conducted by other agencies. Thus, the 2018 review panel concluded that it should be considered as a recognition process rather than an external QA process. However, since it was included in the 2018 review ToR, the panel examined it against Part 2 of the ESG, and recommended that CYQAA include a site visit and a follow-up report (ESG 2.3), publish assessment reports (ESG 2.6), and include the possibility of appealing against its decisions (ESG 2.7) in the process.

As this panel clarified with CYQAA, the assessment process is still in place. The panel agrees with the 2018 review panel that this type of assessment does not fall within the scope of Part 2 of the ESG and would be best considered as a recognition exercise rather than an external QA process. Thus, it is addressed only under ESG 3.6, and the 2018 review recommendations are not included in the sections on ESG 2.1-2.7 of the report. However, the panel notes that in response to the recommendations, the agency now publishes reports with its assessment decisions, and its appeals procedure provides for the possibility of appealing against its assessment decisions. The 2018 review recommendation relating to ESG 2.3 is not considered applicable to a recognition exercise.

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 1 of the ESG.

2018 review recommendations

CYQAA should (1) incorporate into its standards the few aspects of Part 1 of the ESG, including external stakeholder involvement, which are currently not or not explicitly addressed; and (2) gradually shift the focus in its processes after the first accreditation cycle from controlling institutions to supporting them in carrying their responsibility for quality and in quality improvement, with due consideration to be given to the effectiveness of internal quality assurance.

Evidence

The QAA Law states that HEIs should seek to continuously improve the quality of their teaching and research activities and internal quality assurance. It requires that HEIs apply the following standards in internal QA: implement a QA policy and procedures; have in place formal mechanisms for the approval, monitoring, periodic review and revision of programmes; ensure that student assessment is based on published criteria and procedures which are consistently applied; ensure that teaching staff have the necessary qualifications; provide adequate learning resources; collect, analyse and use data for effective programme management; and publish information about programmes and qualifications.

CYQAA has separate sets of criteria (quality indicators) for institutional, departmental and traditional (face-to-face) programme evaluations, and additional criteria for doctoral, e-learning and joint programmes as part of programme evaluation. For programmes in medical fields, the agency applies its own programme evaluation criteria and, additionally, the WFME standards. CBE programmes provided by local HEIs in member states and third-party countries are evaluated against the criteria for programme evaluation. CYQAA's table mapping its criteria onto Part 1 of the ESG, which was provided in the SAR, is reproduced in Annex 5 to this report.

As explained in the SAR, in response to the first 2018 review recommendation, the agency incorporated all aspects, including external stakeholder involvement, into its criteria and self-evaluation and EER templates. To follow the second recommendation, the agency runs knowledge-sharing seminars for HEIs and involves their representatives in its activities (see ESG 3.1).

The internal QA officers from the HEIs whom the panel met with indicated that institutional staff have become more accepting of the role of QA in their work. EEC members commented positively on the quality structures, processes and procedures that were in place in the HEIs. They expressed less conviction, in some cases, as to how the procedures are translated into effective practice that will inculcate a culture of quality in the institutions.

The panel examined the criteria for all evaluation processes, and three recent EERs for each process to see how the standards of Part 1 of the ESG are addressed in practice.

Analysis

Institutional and programme evaluations, including evaluations of joint programmes and cross-border education provided by local HEIs, are mandatory for HEIs. In addition, departmental evaluations are conducted only at universities. Thus, the panel considers CYQAA's criteria for all processes as complementary to one another. It also notes that the criteria for institutional and departmental evaluations largely overlap, and the programme evaluation criteria essentially reproduce all of the standards of Part 1 of the ESG, although they are arranged differently and include some additional aspects and guiding questions for EECs.

CYQAA's criteria for all of the evaluation processes explicitly address all elements of **ESG 1.1**, including a published QA policy, structures, processes and procedures, internal and external stakeholder involvement, and the principles underlying internal QA such as academic integrity and freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination. The publication of a QA policy and external stakeholder involvement have been introduced in line with the related 2018 review recommendation.

The criteria for institutional and departmental evaluations include key aspects of programme design, approval, monitoring and periodic review as expected under **ESG 1.2** and **1.9**, and line with the 2018 review recommendation, now highlight the involvement of both internal and external stakeholders. While, understandably, they are not so detailed as to refer to, for example, what should be evaluated as part of periodic reviews, all such aspects are incorporated in the programme evaluation criteria that reproduce exactly the two relevant standards of the ESG. The additional criteria for doctoral programme evaluation also address, for example, arrangements for the quality assurance of dissertations.

The institutional evaluation criteria focus on student-centred assessment, addressing assessment methods and criteria, appeals and complaints procedures, regular communication with, and feedback provided to, students by the teaching staff in line with **ESG 1.3**. The departmental evaluation criteria additionally refer to attendance to diverse student needs and a variety of pedagogical methods as part of student-centred learning and teaching. The programme evaluation criteria integrate all aspects of ESG 1.3, including an active role and the autonomy of students, attendance to their diverse needs, flexible learning paths and a variety of delivery modes and teaching and learning methods. The additional criteria for e-learning programmes pay special attention to training, guidance and support for, and regular interaction with, students and learning methods which consider the specificity of this mode of learning.

As regards **ESG 1.4**, following the related 2018 review recommendation and suggestions, CYQAA has incorporated aspects such as institutional recognition practices to be based on the Lisbon Recognition Convention into its criteria for all processes, and the certification phase of the student lifecycle into its institutional and departmental evaluation criteria. Currently, all of the evaluation processes cover all aspects of this standard for each phase – from student admission and progression

to recognition and certification. The additional criteria for doctoral programmes address specific requirements for PhD student selection, and the procedure for the preparation and submission of a dissertation.

In line with **ESG 1.5**, all of the evaluation processes cover the recruitment, selection, competence and professional development of teaching staff, their involvement in research and the link between education and research. While the relevant institutional and departmental evaluation focus more on the alignment of staff selection and development with the institutional or departmental development plan, the programme evaluation criteria also highlight transparency and fairness in the recruitment process. For e-learning programmes, they give due consideration to the training and support for teachers related to distance learning methodologies.

The institutional and departmental evaluation criteria address **ESG 1.6** insofar as they refer in broad terms to adequate learning resources, academic support and student services, support structures for students with special needs, and a periodic review of the fitness-for-purpose of facilities. These are supplemented by the detailed programme evaluation criteria that incorporate all aspects of this standard, including the need to consider implications of student-centred learning in resource and support planning and management, information about support services to be made available to students, and the role of both academic and administrative staff in student support. The additional criteria adequately address specific requirements for learning environment and student support in e-learning programmes, and guidance and supervision of PhD students in doctoral programmes.

ESG 1.7 is translated into the agency's criteria for all of the evaluation processes insofar as they cover the collection, analysis and use of information for effective management of a programme or activities of an HEI or department. While the criteria for institutional evaluation do not mention any specific kinds of information, those for departmental evaluation explicitly refer to student performance data and student feedback. Largely reproducing ESG 1.7, the programme evaluation criteria also include all kinds of information listed in the standard, and address the involvement of students and staff in providing and analysing information and planning follow-up action.

ESG 1.8 is fully integrated in the criteria for all of the evaluation processes, with the range of information to be published by an HEI covering all items listed in this standard, a narrower range for a department (e.g. mission and QA policy; programmes, credits and learning outcomes; student admission and graduation; facilities; teaching staff; graduate employment data), and more detailed information for a programme. For ESG 1.9, see above.

Although the evaluation criteria do not refer explicitly to cyclical external QA as defined in **ESG 1.10**, the QAA Law requires that all evaluation processes are conducted every five years, and CYQAA Final Reports indicate the five-year validity period of its accreditation decisions.

The WFME standards for Basic Medical Education programmes adopted by the agency do not address various specific aspects included in Part 1 of the ESG (e.g. ESG 1.1: principles underlying internal QA; ESG 1.2: a qualification assigned to the correct level of an NQF and EQF; ESG 1.3: aspects relating to attendance to diverse student needs; ESG 1.4: recognition practices based on the Lisbon Recognition Convention; ESG 1.6: services for mobile students; ESG 1.8: public information on programmes; ESG 1.9: some aspects to be covered in a programme review). However, evaluations cover both the WFME standards and CYQAA's criteria for programmes that fully integrate Part 1 of the ESG.

Overall, the panel concluded that all Part 1 standards are now well incorporated in CYQAA's evaluation criteria, and this is accurately reflected in its mapping table included in the SAR. The agency's basic set of programme evaluation criteria combined with the additional criteria for joint programmes, which refer to the officially recognised status of, and a cooperation agreement between, partner HEIs, joint

design and delivery of a programme and joint QA processes, cover all aspects highlighted in the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.

The panel confirms that the EERs examined address all Part 1 standards. The 2018 review report noted that EERs focused more on checking whether internal QA mechanisms were in place than on how effective they were, and that the approach was justified in CYQAA's first accreditation cycle. The panel understands from the discussion with the experts that the agency now underscores the importance of effectiveness of internal QA in its briefings for EECs. The feedback from the experts and the EERs examined indicate that the focus in evaluations in the second accreditation cycle, when QA structures and mechanisms are in place, has indeed shifted towards effective performance.

The panel was heartened to note the highly professional nature and confidence of the quality officers from the institutions that they met and how they indicated that institutional staff have become more accepting of the role of quality assurance in their work. It is clear to the panel from the meetings with the heads and internal QA officers of HEIs that the knowledge-sharing seminars run by CYQAA to follow the second 2018 review recommendation have greatly contributed to the HEIs taking on the responsibility for quality assurance and a change in their perception of the agency as guiding and supporting rather than controlling them.

Panel commendations

1. All of the standards of Part 1 of the ESG are effectively incorporated in CYQAA's evaluation criteria and are addressed in external evaluation reports.

Panel conclusion: 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

The QAA Law defines QA as "the systematic confirmation of the continuous assurance and improvement of the quality level", and accreditation as "the statutory recognition", of an HEI, department or programme, both being based on the criteria predetermined by the agency. The SAR explains that CYQAA's evaluations aim to establish whether HEIs have predefined objectives and plans, their plans are appropriate and effectively implemented to ensure the achievement of the objectives and quality improvement; the agency acts as an enhancer for HEIs, acknowledging their strengths and identifying areas for improvement, and supporting them to create a culture for continuous development.

The QAA Law prescribes, for example, the following elements of CYQAA's evaluation methodologies: the categories of experts to be involved in an EEC for each evaluation process (see ESG 2.4); a general timeframe for, and the stages of, an evaluation process, including the requirement to monitor the implementation of recommendations made as a result of an evaluation (ESG 2.3). Evaluation criteria (ESG 2.1) are set by the agency. External evaluations end with an accreditation decision (ESG 2.5), which is stated in a CYQAA Final Report (ESG 2.6), and HEIs are required to submit follow-up reports to demonstrate how they have implemented recommendations from an evaluation (ESG 2.3).

As stated in the SAR, CYQAA's evaluation methodologies are based on the national legislation, the ESG and feedback from the stakeholders. At the stage of development, all draft documents describing the external evaluation methodology and criteria, including templates, were sent to HEIs for feedback and revised accordingly (Online clarification meeting; Meetings with Heads of HEIs).

CYQAA supplemented its programme evaluation criteria with those specific to joint programmes (see ESG 2.1). Additionally, for CBE and evaluations conducted in other countries, it developed "Cross-Border Quality Assurance – Policy and Guidelines". The document addresses aspects such as the collection of background information, including liaising with a local agency, a meeting between the agency and the HEI concerned to discuss the context and the QA process; the selection of, and the briefing for experts, with consideration given to cultural and contextual differences; and formal recognition of the evaluation outcome by the competent national body. In an ongoing programme evaluation in Latvia, CYQAA contacted the local agency, analysed the national legislation and external QA methodology, appointed an EEC in accordance with its own rules and additionally involved two local stakeholder (trade union and student) representatives as non-voting observers; and conducted the evaluation against its own criteria, while considering the specificity of the national context (Online clarification meeting).

The key elements of the evaluation processes have remained unchanged since the agency's establishment as they are prescribed by the QAA Law. The evaluation criteria and templates are reviewed every two years. For continuous improvement of its methodologies, the agency collects feedback from HEIs and EECs through post-evaluation surveys, and in structured meetings with HEIs and the national authorities (see ESG 3.6 and 3.1). In response to the feedback from HEIs, it has, for example, adapted its evaluation criteria and templates to the specificity of doctoral, joint and e-learning programmes, and introduced "cluster" evaluations, i.e. departmental evaluations which include evaluations of programmes in the same field of study at different levels. The improvements are much appreciated by the HEIs; "cluster" evaluations have significantly reduced the burden of evaluations. (SAR; Onsite pre-visit clarification meeting; Meeting with internal QA officers of HEIs)

As CYQAA explained in its written pre-visit clarifications, universities undergo both institutional and departmental evaluations as they are much larger than non-university HEIs in terms of the number of students, staff and programmes, and infrastructure. While institutional evaluations provide a "big picture", departmental evaluations aim to ensure that improvements are made in a balanced way across an HEI, and the two processes jointly contribute to the alignment of departmental goals with the broader institutional mission and strategic objectives and vice versa.

The heads and internal QA officers of HEIs whom the panel met emphasised benefits from the agency's external evaluations such as uniform and transparent institutional procedures and a functional internal QA system in place, improved quality of programmes, greater support among staff for QA and an emerging quality culture. At the same time, they believe that as the HEIs and their QA systems have matured, the evaluation processes could be less burdensome, more flexible and thus better adapted to the specificity of each type of HEI. As universities undergo institutional, departmental and programme evaluations every five years, at least some processes are going on all the time. The criteria for institutional and departmental evaluations largely overlap; thus, a considerable overlap can occur in the information that has to be provided for the different types of evaluation. There is also some overlap in the institutional and programme evaluation criteria. Some criteria are not relevant to all types of HEIs or programmes (e.g. requirements for staff resources or on-campus exams for distance learning). The participants also drew attention to what they perceive as the excessively high accreditation fees set by the national authorities.

Analysis

The objectives of CYQAA's evaluation processes are clearly defined in the law and further translated into the goals in its mission statement (see ESG 3.1) that embrace the compliance and quality enhancement aspects of its evaluation processes. It is also clear to the panel from the meetings with the representatives of HEIs that the objectives are widely accepted, and that the agency makes a commendable effort to ensure that the HEIs are involved as its partners in the development and continuous improvement of its evaluation methodologies insofar as modifications are allowed by the law. Mechanisms for feedback collection from HEIs and EECs on an ongoing basis are in place (see ESG 3.6), as is a practice of reviewing the evaluation criteria and documents, and improvements that the agency makes in response to the feedback are much appreciated by the HEIs.

While the evaluation methodologies are largely prescribed by the law, they are based on, and compliant with the ESG. The agency has also adapted its methodologies for joint programme and CBE evaluations so that they fit into the national legal framework on the one hand, and on the other hand are closely aligned with the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes and the Key Considerations for Cross-Border Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. The panel also understands from its meetings with the agency that the procedure for cross-border QA is rigorously followed in practice. (For comments and the related recommendation on the agency's autonomy in designing methodologies, see ESG 3.3).

Based on the QAA Law, the EER templates, the recent EERs examined and its discussions with HEIs, the panel concluded that the evaluation processes are fit for their dual purpose. Evaluations provide both the evidence to demonstrate whether HEIs meet specific requirements set by the law and useful recommendations for quality improvement. The panel also confirms that the outcome of each evaluation is clearly stated in the CYQAA Final Report (see ESG 2.6). Follow-up reports submitted by HEIs focus on the implementation of recommendations and can also describe other improvements made by HEIs in line with the ESG (see ESG 2.3).

The panel welcomes the recent introduction of "cluster" evaluations of departments and programmes as a step towards reducing the burden of external QA on HEIs. It gathers, however, from the discussions with the representatives of HEIs that the balance between the costs, in terms of both the amount of the fee and the effort required, and the benefits have changed slightly over the years, particularly for universities, which are subject to periodic programme, departmental and institutional evaluations on a five-yearly basis. While this format might have been appropriate to a system in development, as the higher education QA system becomes more mature, there is a need to streamline these processes to reduce the burden on HEIs. If legislative amendment is required, the panel believes that the current process of amending the QAA Law could provide a useful opportunity to do so. Consideration could be given as to whether the departmental evaluations could be organised by the institutions as part of their internal quality assurance systems which could then be audited as part of the agency's institutional evaluation process.

The panel also acknowledged that some HEIs might struggle to demonstrate the impact of implemented changes (particularly to their curriculum) within the five-year evaluation cycle, as they have yet to obtain feedback from the graduates before the next evaluation. However, the panel understands that such limitations are part of the quality assurance processes, and encourages further communication between the agency and the HEIs in such cases.

The panel also agrees with the representatives of HEIs that there is some unnecessary duplication of the evaluation criteria, for example, those which address Learning and Teaching and QA of programmes and are included in all types of evaluation processes. The 2018 review panel suggested that the criteria could be reviewed to eliminate any unnecessary overlap. In reviewing its criteria, the

agency could also consider the concerns expressed by the HEIs regarding the relevance of some quality indicators to the specificity of a given type of HEI.

Panel commendations

1. Within the limits set by the law, CYQAA systematically improves its evaluation methodologies in response to the feedback collected from institutions and external experts.

Panel recommendations

1. To reduce the burden of external quality assurance on institutions, CYQAA should continue streamlining its evaluation processes, considering, in particular, the balance of cost and benefit for universities undergoing both departmental and institutional evaluations in addition to programme evaluations, and review its evaluation criteria to eliminate any unnecessary overlap between those applied in all types of evaluation processes.

Panel conclusion: 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

2018 review recommendations

CYQAA should (1) expand the focus of the follow-up stage in its evaluations to embrace not only control-oriented measures but also support for quality improvement; and (2) give more consideration to the specificity of joint programmes in its briefings for experts to ensure full consistency in conducting evaluations.

Evidence

All external evaluation processes include the following main stages: the submission of an application by an HEI, including its self-assessment report; an external evaluation, including a site visit, conducted by an EEC; an EER prepared by the EEC and forwarded to the HEI; a three-month period for the HEI to respond to, and implement recommendations made in, the EER, where possible within this timeframe; an accreditation decision taken by the Council; and a follow-up. The evaluation procedure is published on the CYQAA website. (QAA Law; SAR)

The QAA Law also provides for two additional stages of an evaluation procedure. A second evaluation can be conducted where it is recommended by an EEC and necessary for the Council to take the final accreditation decision as the evidence available after the first evaluation is insufficient or the Council needs confirmation from the EEC that the action taken by the HEI concerned and described in its response to the EER ensures compliance with the accreditation criteria. Such evaluations follow the same procedure as first evaluations. An additional follow-up (or "audit" as referred to in the SAR) can be conducted during the validity period of the awarded accreditation, on CYQAA's initiative or upon

the recommendation of the Minister in charge of higher education, to ascertain whether an HEI, department or programme continues to meet the accreditation criteria. As CYQAA explained in its written pre-visit clarifications, it can be undertaken on a scheduled or ad-hoc basis, for example, in response to a complaint filed with the agency (see ESG 2.7), and can include a site visit.

A site visit aims to verify the accuracy of information in an HEI's application, clarify or further explore issues identified by an EEC and / or collect additional information. The indicative site visit agenda includes meetings with the top-and middle-level management, unit(s) responsible for internal QA, staff and students; examination of final theses; and a tour of facilities. The duration of a visit depends on the size of an HEI or department, the number and type of programmes, and the significance of issues to be explored. It usually lasts for one day as part of a programme evaluation, and two days as part of a departmental or institutional evaluation. (SAR; Site visit template; Online clarification meeting)

At the time of the previous review, the follow-up was based on information gathered by CYQAA from various sources (e.g. HEIs' reports on changes, semester reports providing data on students, teaching staff, size of classes, and information published by HEIs), and aimed to check whether HEIs continue to meet the accreditation criteria. To carry out the first 2018 review recommendation, CYQAA has introduced a follow-up report where an HEI provides evidence on action taken to implement any recommendations made in the agency's Final Report which could not be fulfilled within the three-month period set aside for the HEI's response to the EER, and on any other action taken to improve the performance of the institution, department or programme concerned. The timeframe for the implementation of recommendations and the submission of a follow-up report is set in the Final Report and varies from 1 to 12 months. Reports are reviewed by the Council. Additionally, the agency uses the various afore-mentioned sources to monitor developments in HEIs. (SAR; Final clarification meeting)

To implement the second 2018 review recommendation, the agency added a separate section with additional criteria for joint programmes (see also ESG 2.1), and as stated in the SAR, it now pays special attention in its briefings for EECs to the specific criteria for joint programmes.

CYQAA has in place the following mechanisms to ensure that its evaluation processes are reliable and consistently implemented:
- templates for application (self-evaluation) forms, with guidelines, for HEIs, a site visit agenda, EERs, an HEI's response to the EER and an EEC's feedback report, and CYQAA's Final Report, and a follow-up report;
- Cross-Border Quality Assurance – Policy and Guidelines (see ESG 2.2);
- Guidelines for the Members of External Evaluation Committees, and a briefing for each EEC (see also ESG 2.4); and
- the appointment of a CYQAA coordinator for each evaluation to support an EEC;
- post-evaluation surveys of the evaluated HEIs and EEC members.

The representatives of HEIs told the panel that the evaluation guidelines and templates are clear, the agency swiftly responds to their requests for any additional information if needed and is consistent in its evaluation processes. The evaluation documents are, likewise, clear to the experts whom the panel met, the briefing provides all the information they need to understand the methodology (see also ESG 2.4), and a site visit allows them to verify the accuracy of information provided in an HEI's self-assessment report. However, as signalled under ESG 3.6, for the academic experts, students and practitioners involved in EECs, it was not always clear how and if the views that they expressed and the recommendations they made in EERs would find their way into eventual institutional change.

Analysis

The panel confirms that CYQAA's evaluation processes are predefined and published on its website. In line with the related suggestion of the 2018 review panel, the website now presents information on the evaluation processes in a more integrated way. However, while the template for follow-up reports

is published in the relevant section of the website, the description of the stages of the processes does not include the follow-up. The panel believes it is important that, not only institutions, but also those conducting evaluations and stakeholders throughout the system have easy access to clear information on how the outcomes of the evaluations will be reported on and followed-up.

The panel recognises that programme, departmental and institutional evaluation processes are by now well established and follow the four-stage model recommended in this standard. The panel also believes that CYQAA has in place adequate mechanisms for ensuring consistency in conducting its evaluation processes. As regards the second 2018 review recommendation, based on the sample of the EERs examined, the panel confirms that the aspects specific to joint programmes are now consistently addressed in programme evaluations.

The panel found evidence (see ESG 3.1 and 2.2) that the evaluation processes have contributed to quality enhancement and building a quality culture in HEIs, even if, as noted under ESG 2.2., there is room for improvement in the evaluation methodologies to make them even more useful and less burdensome for the HEIs. The panel understands from the meeting with the experts that an HEI's self-assessment report, combined with a site visit, allows them to collect sufficient evidence to make reliable judgments. As labour-market relevance of programmes is a priority of the MESY and the external stakeholders consider that employers could provide an added value as EEC members (see ESG 3.1), the panel believes that the agency could additionally include a meeting with employers (organisations employing graduates) in its indicative site visit agenda for programme evaluation.

In line with the related 2018 review recommendation, the follow-up process is now based on a consistent approach and focuses on quality improvements recommended in CYQAA Final Reports rather than on checking through various information sources whether the accreditation criteria are still met. However, based on the panel's own search and the comments from the experts interviewed, it appears that not all follow-up reports are published, or they are not easily accessible or communicated to the public and stakeholders, on the agency's website. The panel believes that the publication of follow-up reports and the dissemination of the follow-up process among a wider stakeholder group would further increase system confidence in the effectiveness of QA.

Panel recommendations

1. CYQAA should publish on its website clear information about the follow-up stage of evaluation processes and all follow-up reports submitted by institutions so that all stakeholders are informed on improvements made by HEIs in response to outcomes of external evaluations.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

1. CYQAA could consider including a meeting with employers in its indicative site visit agenda for programme evaluations so that external evaluation committees gather additional useful evidence on the relevance of programmes to labour market needs.

Panel conclusion: 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).

2018 review recommendations

CYQAA should (1) publish the selection procedure and criteria for all categories of experts on its website; and (2) provide additional training to students to prepare them to contribute to all relevant evaluation areas, including student involvement in internal quality assurance and student-centred learning.

Evidence

External evaluations are conducted by EECs. Pursuant to the QAA Law, the composition of an EEC is as follows:

- institutional evaluation: at least three academic experts, including at least one international expert, and a student services expert, a building and technological infrastructure expert, and a student;

- departmental evaluation, programme and joint programme evaluations, and evaluation of CBE offered by local HEIs in member states and third-party countries: at least three academic experts, including at least one international expert, a student, and a representative of the professional association that grants licences to practise a given profession if the subject area of the department or programme relates to a regulated profession.

As regards academics, CYQAA involves only international experts as the small size of the country and collaboration among HEIs might give rise to a conflict of interest for Cypriot experts. Thus, only student services and building and infrastructure experts, students and practitioners are national experts. (Written pre-visit clarifications; Online clarification meeting). Additionally, where appropriate, an EEC may include an expert in distance learning (QAA Law; SAR). As noted under ESG 3.1, the agency's stakeholders believe that employers representing non-regulated professions could also be usefully involved in EECs. The CYQAA Council considers that although they are not involved, there is no big gap as HEIs involve employers in programme development.

EEC members are selected from CYQAA's pool of experts. To fulfil the first 2018 review recommendation, the agency has refined its selection criteria for students and practitioners, and published the criteria for all types of experts, together with the information on how they are recruited for the pool, and an online application form on its website. It also published an open call for international experts on the ENQA website. (SAR; Website; Online clarification meeting)

CYQAA recruits academic experts for its pool through online search and its website where candidates can submit applications. The criteria include possessing a PhD degree, having the rank of professor or professor emeritus (in the case of departmental and institutional evaluations) or associate professor; teaching or research experience in the relevant field; and experience in QA, programme development and review. International experts should also be fully proficient in English and/or in the instruction language of the programme under evaluation.

Students are proposed by the public universities, through the provision to the agency of a list of candidates annually, or students may apply via the agency website. The criteria include high academic performance, and experience in external evaluation or societal engagement (e.g. volunteering) activities. The students whom the panel met were informed by their home institutions that they had been pre-selected but were not entirely clear about the pre-selection procedure (other than the criterion of high academic achievement), or about the possibility of submitting an online application. They also believe that it would be beneficial to involve their colleagues from colleges and private universities in evaluation processes as well, as their needs might differ from those of students at public universities.

CYQAA selects practitioners from a list of candidates provided each year by the accredited associations for regulated professions. The criteria include knowledge of the legislation on professional registration, and experience in professional reviews. (SAR; CYQAA website) As the panel learned in

the meetings with representatives of professional bodies, they expressed interest in working for CYQAA as experts in response to a circular email sent to staff by their home organisations.

Members of an EEC are pre-selected by the relevant CYQAA evaluation coordinator, based on the relevance of their CVs and the principle of no conflict of interest, and are approved by the Council Chair. Students represent the field of study under evaluation or a related field so that they can contribute to all aspects of an evaluation. For joint programme evaluations, the agency selects experts with previous experience in such processes and, additionally, local stakeholder representatives as non-voting observers for evaluations in other countries (see ESG 2.2). As noted under ESG 3.3 and 3.6, EEC members sign a no-conflict-of-interest declaration and are struck off the pool for failure to disclose a conflict of interest or for unprofessional conduct; several experts have been excluded for unprofessional conduct. (SAR; Online and final clarification meetings; Meetings with experts)

EECs receive the Guidelines for the Members of External Evaluation Committees, which include information on each step in the evaluation process and guidelines for writing an EER. The briefing for each EEC covers information about the agency, the national legal framework, the evaluation procedure and criteria; and guidelines for report writing. For an evaluation in another country, the briefing also covers the national higher education and QA framework. The briefing session does not provide additional information on the national context for international experts; in the agency's view, experienced experts can easily understand the context as the higher education system is not complicated, the evaluation methodology is consistent with the ESG, and the evaluation coordinator is available throughout the process to support the EEC. (SAR; Online clarification meeting).

To implement the second 2018 review recommendation, CYQAA has recently run training workshops on the evaluation criteria for student experts and a seminar on student-centred learning, teaching and assessment, attended by representatives of HEIs, including students (see ESG 3.1). As the panel learned in the final clarification meeting, there is no general training for experts recruited to the pool or regular training for the registered experts and no need for that as the briefing is solid, experts are experienced and the documents describing the evaluation methodology are published and provided to EECs.

The results of CYQAA's post-evaluation surveys of EECs show that most experts consider the evaluation and report writing guidelines and the EER template "excellent" or "adequate". For the international academic, national building and infrastructure and student services experts and students whom the panel met, the guidelines are straightforward, the briefing is comprehensive and CYQAA evaluation coordinators guide EECs throughout the evaluation process. As noted under ESG 3.6, the expertise of EECs is highly valued by HEIs. However, as the panel learned in the meeting with their representatives, some EECs could be more flexible and pay more attention to the local circumstances and the specificity of each type of HEI (e.g. a public HEI cannot hire more staff within the recommended timeframe as this requires extra funding to be provided by the MESY).

As stated in the Guidelines for EECs, all EEC members are expected to contribute to each stage of an evaluation and share the responsibility for the EER. The international experts, who chair EECs, confirmed to the panel that all members are treated as equals, contribute to findings and can vote, if required. The approach to report drafting varies: some chairs allocate a part of the EER to each member or to the lead academic; others draft some sections themselves; students are always asked for inputs but do not draft any section. Some students are keen to participate, but others are not extensively involved due to their limited language skills, subject area knowledge or preparation. The students interviewed felt that they were considered equal to other EEC members. All had a lead role in the site-visit meeting with students; some contributed mainly to "student matters", a more limited number to the evaluation of the programme, but all provided oral or written inputs to an EER. The practitioners whom the panel met look at facilities, programme review arrangements and labour-

market relevance of programmes, paying special attention to the requirements for the licensing of future graduates.

Analysis

The guidelines for the standard recommend that peer experts provide input from various perspectives, including those of institutions, academics, students and employers or professional practitioners. The current legal composition of EECs requires the use of academic and student experts and nominees of the regulated professions for departments and programmes producing practitioners. Further to the related suggestion in the 2018 review report, the panel believes that a widening of the stakeholder base to include members from the world of work representing non-regulated professions in EECs would contribute to evaluating not only the quality but also the relevance of programmes. Their expertise and inputs could be valuable for EECs in assessing compliance with the criteria addressing external stakeholder involvement (for example, in the sub-areas "Mission and strategic planning", "Connecting with society", "Quality assurance", "Learning and teaching" and "Research" as part of departmental evaluation) or labour-market relevance of programmes (for example, in the area "Study programme and study programme's design and development" as part of programme evaluation).

All EECs have student members as required in the standard. However, the pool from which the students are drawn is very narrow (for the related comments, see ESG 3.1). The historical practice of only using students from the public universities and where the primary selection mechanism (other than disciplinary relevance) is the student's academic ranking might have been appropriate to a system when the concept of students as experts in panels was relatively new. The panel believes that a wider pool of student experience would now be beneficial to the system.

As noted under ESG 3.1, the panel met no objections to the widening of EEC membership in relation to students and the world of work among the many interactions it had with stakeholders over the course of the review. If this requires legislative change, perhaps this could form part of the ongoing discussion to amend the current QAA Law.

The panel confirms that in line with the related 2018 review recommendation, the selection criteria for all types of experts, and the information on how the agency recruits experts to its pool, are now published on the CYQAA website. The agency's procedure for the appointment of EECs is transparent, with clearly defined criteria, the involvement of both an evaluation coordinator and the Council Chair, and due consideration given to the relevance of their expertise and no conflict of interest. The panel believes, however, that the agency could agree with the HEIs and the professional bodies that pre-select students and practitioners on a uniform and more transparent procedure for their recruitment (e.g. a published open call for applications) and additionally publish it on its website.

The panel found that the agency has made great efforts to ensure that high-quality academic evaluators are used in EECs. It is testimony to the ambition of Cyprus and CYQAA that they have selected and procured academic evaluators from highly ranked international universities to benchmark the quality of higher education in Cyprus. The panel understands from the meeting with experts that the agency's briefing gives them a good understanding of the evaluation methodology. It notes, however, that recommendations in some EERs do not take into consideration the specific local circumstances in which different types of HEI operate.

While it is clear that the academic evaluators are selected not just on their disciplinary excellence but also their experience in external evaluation, it is important that the pool of student members used in panels are provided with training opportunities in advance of deployment. The training seminar recently organised for student experts to carry out the related 2018 recommendation is a welcome step in this direction. The panel also recognises that student members of EECs receive comprehensive briefing information and meet with the other EEC members in advance of an evaluation. It notes,

however, that their contribution to the work of EECs varies depending on how well they are prepared, and believes that ongoing annual training of the student pool would improve their effectiveness.

HEIs have a role to play in ensuring that students have an opportunity to participate fully and widely in the internal QA structures. POFEN could also be expected to have a role in ensuring that students are informed about the purposes of quality assurance and the vital role that students can play in the quality of their education. The panel would suggest that the agency finds a way to expand its engagement with the wider student body through seminars, for instance.

Panel commendations

1. The involvement of international experts in all evaluations enhances the transparency of the processes and their value for institutions.

Panel recommendations

1. CYQAA should expand membership of its external evaluation committees, in particular, for programme and departmental evaluations, to include employers representing non-regulated professions.
2. CYQAA should expand the pool from which student experts are selected to include candidates put forward by institutions other than the public universities.
3. CYQAA should provide annual training to its pool of student experts to maximise their involvement in, and contribution to external evaluations.

Panel suggestions for further improvement

1. A clear and published procedure for the pre-selection of students and practitioners as prospective experts by higher education institutions and professional bodies would enhance the transparency of the recruitment process.
2. CYQAA's briefings could sensitise international experts to the specific local circumstances in which different types of HEIs operate to ensure that all recommendations in evaluation reports are pertinent and practicable.
3. CYQAA is encouraged to consider how it can engage with the wider student body through higher education institutions and the national students' union to provide students with opportunities to enhance their expertise and involvement in quality assurance.

Panel conclusion: 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.

2018 review recommendations

CYQAA should (1) develop more detailed and written guidelines for experts to ensure greater consistency in scoring; (2) state more explicitly in its decision-making procedure whether accreditation can be granted in any case where an HEI has not fully implemented a minor recommendation made in an external evaluation report.

Evidence

The QAA Law requires that CYQAA's decisions in evaluation processes be based on the criteria which are predefined by the agency, and published by the minister in charge of education in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Cyprus and by the agency on its website. The criteria are included in the application (self-assessment) forms and EER templates available on the CYQAA website. (SAR; website)

As explained in the SAR, to ensure that the criteria are consistently applied in evaluations, the agency sends to an EEC the Guidelines for the Members of External Evaluation Committees and the EER template a month before the site visit, holds a briefing for the EEC, appoints a coordinator to support the EEC (see ESG 2.3 and 2.4), and collects feedback from evaluated HEIs and EECs through surveys (ESG 3.6). The Guidelines state that EECs are expected to provide evidence to support their conclusions in EERs. In response to the first 2018 review recommendation, CYQAA has included in the EER templates detailed guidelines on the structure and content of the report, based on the evaluation areas, and a section where the EEC indicates the level of compliance with the criteria (programme evaluation) or the level of compliance and score per indicator for each sub-area (institutional and departmental evaluations) (see also ESG 2.6).

Accreditation decisions are taken by the CYQAA Council. As an outcome of an evaluation process, the Council may defer its decision and request further clarification or action; grant accreditation (with recommendations where appropriate); refuse accreditation; or recommend a second evaluation (see ESG 2.3). In taking a decision, the Council considers an EEC's EER, the evaluated HEI's response to the EER, the EEC's feedback report on the HEI's response where necessary (see ESG 2.6), and any additional information which the Council may request from the HEI where necessary. Decisions should be taken by a simple majority vote but there has been no need for voting so far as decisions have been made by consensus (see ESG 3.3). To implement the second 2018 review recommendation, CYQAA now explicitly states in its procedure that accreditation can be granted in the case where an HEI has not fully implemented minor recommendations made in an EER (recommendations which were not implemented by the time when the Council takes a decision are included in a CYQAA Final Report; see ESG 2.3).

Results of the post-evaluation surveys of evaluated HEIs (SAR, Annex II) indicate that most of the respondents consider CYQAA's decision-making to be "proportionate, consistent and fair". For the representatives of HEIs whom the panel met, the evaluation criteria are clear, and EECs and the agency are fair and consistent in their evaluation and accreditation decision (see ESG 3.1, 3.3 and 2.3).

Analysis

The panel confirms that CYQAA's evaluation criteria are clear and published in the application and EER templates on its website. As recommended by the 2018 review panel, the EER templates now provide detailed guidelines to EECs on the content and scoring and compliance levels in reports. The panel believes that with the revised guidelines, the mechanisms in place are sufficient to ensure that EECs are consistent in their interpretation of the evaluation criteria, scoring and judgments on compliance, and collect ample evidence to substantiate their judgements. The EERs examined by the panel clearly follow a consistent and evidence-based approach.

The panel also confirms that the types of accreditation decisions to be taken the Council, including the clarifying statement as recommended by the 2018 review panel, are published on the CYQAA website. The panel considers that EERs, HEIs' responses to EERs (where any possible misinterpretation of evidence against the evaluation criteria can be corrected) and, if necessary, EECs' feedback reports (which contain containing further comments on compliance with the criteria), combined with collective decision-making within the Council provide a solid basis for consistency in the final outcomes of the agency's accreditation processes. The panel also notes that the representatives of HEIs whom it met

raised no issues with the criteria against which they were being evaluated and expressed no concerns about inconsistencies in report findings or recommendations or in the Council's accreditation decisions.

Panel conclusion: 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.

2018 review recommendations

CYQAA should (1) put in place a mechanism to ensure that all external evaluation reports are of comparably high quality in terms of evidence to substantiate scores, comments being specific and consistency between scores and comments, and that they give due consideration to the effectiveness of internal quality assurance; (2) provide space in the evaluation report template to address the specificity of joint programmes; (3) introduce an annex to an external evaluation report for experts to comment on the implementation of recommendations by institutions, and to be published together with a report; and (4) publish all reports, including those leading to refusal of accreditation, in addition to those currently available on its website.

Evidence

An EEC prepares an EER which is forwarded to the evaluated HEI for a response. The response includes corrections of, or comments on, possible factual errors or misconceptions, and evidence on how the HEI has implemented recommendations in the EER within the three months that it has to prepare its response. If major issues (e.g. regarding the curriculum) are identified in the EER and the Council seeks advice from the EEC on the implementation of recommendations, the EEC prepares a feedback report. CYQAA introduced the feedback report template to address the third 2018 review recommendation (previously, EECs provided feedback in an unstructured form). At the end of the evaluation process, CYQAA produces its Final Report. It includes key details about the legal basis and evaluation procedure, the accreditation decision and its validity period; any recommendations which may still need to be implemented by the evaluated HEI after the three-month period allotted for its response, with the timeframe set for their implementation; and a statement that during the validity period the agency may verify whether the accreditation criteria continue to be fulfilled and withdraw the awarded accreditation if this is not the case. (SAR; Document templates)

In response to the fourth 2018 review recommendations, the agency has published on its website all EERs, including those leading to a refusal of accreditation. For each evaluation, it now publishes an EER together with the evaluated HEI's response to the EER; the EEC's feedback report on the HEI response if requested by the Council (and the HEI's response if the EEC's feedback report is sent to the HEI for further comments); and the CYQAA Final Report. Currently, all documents are published shortly after the Council's decision. (SAR; CYQAA website; Online clarification meeting)

The EER template includes information about the evaluation process (legal basis, the site visit and the EEC); guidelines on the structure and content of the EER: sections structured according to the evaluation areas and sub-areas (with a score and its justification for each quality indicator additionally included for institutional and departmental evaluations), findings, strengths, areas for improvement and recommendations, and the level of compliance for each sub-area; and conclusions and final remarks. To

carry out the second 2018 review recommendation, CYQAA has modified the EER templates for programme evaluation to include a section with the criteria specific to joint programmes.

An EER should provide evidence to substantiate comments and conclusions, and comments should be clear and specific and address both positive and negative aspects (Guidelines for the Members of EECs). In response to the first 2018 review recommendation, the EER templates have been amended to include detailed guidelines (SAR). The Council checks the quality of EERs as they provide the basis for its decisions. No EER has been sent back to an EEC for improvement, but some EECs have been requested to provide feedback on the HEIs' responses to their EERs. (SAR; Online clarification meeting; Meeting with the Council) Results of CYQAA's post-evaluation surveys (SAR, Annex II) indicate that most of the respondent HEIs consider EERs to be well written, and the representatives of HEIs whom the panel met expressed no concerns about the quality of EERs.

Analysis

The panel confirms that the EER templates cover all elements recommended in this standard, and in line with the related 2018 review recommendation, the revised template for programme evaluation now includes criteria specific to joint programmes.

The EERs examined by the panel are written in clear and easily accessible language, highlight both areas of good practice and areas for improvement, and provide clear recommendations for follow-up action. Although CYQAA has not put in place any new mechanism to ensure a comparably high quality of reports since the previous review, the panel understands from its discussions with the representatives of HEIs and the Council that EERs are now carefully scrutinised by the Council. Based on the critical comments in the 2018 review report and the sample of recent EERs examined by the panel, the standard of reporting has improved; the recent reports provide sufficient evidence to substantiate findings and conclusions, are consistent in terms of comments and scores and/or compliance levels, and pay attention to the effectiveness of internal QA.

The panel notes that CYQAA has in place the accepted practice of forwarding an EER to the evaluated HEI for factual corrections and comments, and as recommended in the 2018 review report, EECs now have a structured feedback form to comment on the HEIs' responses to EERs where appropriate.

The panel also confirms that in line with the related 2018 recommendation, all EERs, including those resulting in refusal of accreditation, Final Reports, which include the Council's accreditation decisions, HEIs' responses to EERs, as well as EECs' feedback reports and HEIs' responses to feedback reports where prepared, are now published on CYQAA's website. The panel reiterates, however, its recommendation that any follow-up report arising from an evaluation should be clearly published alongside the original review report (for the recommendation, see ESG 2.3).

Panel conclusion: 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.

2018 review recommendations

CYQAA should (1) establish a separate committee of experts for considering appeals against its accreditation decisions to ensure full transparency (as proposed in the amendments to the legislation already drafted); and (2) integrate current practices into a clearly defined complaints procedure.

Evidence

In response to the 2018 review recommendations, CYQAA has adopted and published a Complaints Policy and has revised its Appeals Procedure (SAR; CYQAA website). Information about the possibility to lodge a complaint or an appeal is published on the agency's website. HEIs are also informed about the possibility to appeal the outcome of an evaluation in CYQAA's Final Reports (Website; Final Reports; Meetings with heads and internal QA officers of HEIs)

Complaints

A complaint can be filed in case an individual or organisation has substantiated concerns about (1) the compliance of an accredited HEI, department or programme with the agency's accreditation criteria, the ESG and / or the WFME standards; (2) the conduct of an evaluation process; or (3) the agency's own processes.

Complaints are considered by the CYQAA Council. Where a complaint is not substantiated by evidence, the Council takes no action, and the complainant is informed thereof. Where a complaint is substantiated, the next steps, which should be completed within two months, depend on its subject matter:

- Complaints about the compliance of an HEI, department or programme with the accreditation criteria: If a complaint refers to an isolated case which does not have substantial impact on the compliance with the criteria, the Council issues a formal warning to the HEI concerned, which is published on the CYQAA website. If there are major concerns about the compliance with the criteria, the Council initiates an additional follow-up ("audit"; see ESG 2.3) to verify whether the criteria are still met. Where findings from such a follow-up further substantiate the complaint, the Council may revoke its accreditation decision or initiate an additional evaluation. In such cases, the HEI concerned is requested to make representations before the Council takes a final decision. The final decision is published on the CYQAA website;

- Complaints about the conduct of an evaluation process or the agency's own processes: To examine the issue, the Council may review documents, request additional written evidence and interview the parties concerned. If there has been a breach of integrity, corrective measures can include re-assessing an HEI's application, repeating the entire evaluation process or parts thereof, or sanctions provided for in the Code of Deontology (for the Council), the Code of Conduct and Ethics (for staff) or the Declaration of Absence of Conflict of Interest (for experts).

(QAA Law; SAR; CYQAA's Codes of Deontology, Code of Conduct and Ethics and Declaration of Absence of Conflict of Interest; Written pre-visit clarifications)

Between 2018 and 2022, 18 complaints were filed with the agency (SAR). As the Council explained to the panel, there has been no complaint about the conduct of an evaluation process or the agency's own processes; most of them concerned circumstances at HEIs or disputes among HEIs (for example, about information published or spread by competing HEIs). In eleven cases, the Council examined a substantiated compliant or addressed the matter in its response (e.g. advice for an HEI to approach the competent bodies or how an issue can be resolved); in six cases, it issued a formal recommendation to rectify the circumstances; and one case was referred to the police. (SAR; Meeting with the Council) No complaint has been lodged by the representatives of HEIs whom the panel met; minor issues were addressed immediately by the agency.

Appeals

As stated in the QAA Law, an HEI may raise an objection requesting a review of the evaluation outcome and state the grounds which, in its opinion, justify the withdrawal and the review of the EER. HEIs can appeal against the outcome of any evaluation process. As stated in the Appeals Procedure, an appeal "may only be based on those facts which are contained in the institutions' [evaluation] files and the Council's minutes".

Pursuant to the Appeals Procedure, which is described in the SAR and published on the CYQAA website, the Council decides whether an appeal is allowed for consideration ("accepted") or rejected as either unsubstantiated or based on grounds violating the Law. The procedure states that "If the Council decides to accept the appeal, it appoints a three-member Advisory Committee of Experts (ACE) that examines the grounds of the appeal". An ACE consists of three experts selected from the agency's pool. The ACE examines the evaluation file and the grounds for the appeal, and submits a report to the Council. The report contains "the grounds of the appeal, the corresponding data available in the institution's file and its justified observations in the light of the available evidence". Within two months of the receipt of the appeal, the Council takes the final decision to uphold or dismiss the appeal. The Council's decision can be challenged only by an appeal to a court. Until the time of the site visit, no appeal had been lodged with a court (SAR).

As CYQAA explained in its written pre-visit clarifications, where allowed, an appeal is considered by the Council itself if it concerns the thematic field that falls within the areas of its members' expertise. Otherwise, the Council appoints an ad-hoc ACE. As CYQAA argued in its additional pre-visit clarifications, an ACE is appointed only in cases extending beyond the Council's areas of expertise as its members represent a wide variety of disciplines and, thus, have "the necessary educational and experiential foundations to evaluate the validity of an appeal". In the meeting with the panel, the Council further clarified that an ACE is appointed when the Council is unable to make a judgment and decision on its own and intends to reject the appeal.

The agency adopted the revised Appeals Procedure in June 2019. Fifteen appeals were filed between 2018 and 2022 (8 in 2018, 4 in 2019, 0 in 2020 and 2021, 3 in 2022); five were upheld and ten dismissed (4 upheld and 4 dismissed in 2018; 1 and 3 respectively in 2019; 1 and 2 respectively in 2022) (SAR). Until the time of the panel's site visit, an ACE was appointed for one appeal, which was lodged in 2023, concerned the field of fine arts, and was still considered at the time of the site visit.

In the meeting with the panel, members of the only ACE set up so far pointed to the lack of clarity on what exactly the appeals process was about and what the ACE's role was – whether their task was to check if the evaluation procedure had been followed, as they would expect, or to re-evaluate the programme concerned and/or verify if deficiencies had been addressed. They emphasised, however, that that this was the first ACE appointed by the agency, and the process was taken seriously by the agency. With no onsite visit, they would not be in a position to re-evaluate the programme. They concluded that the evaluation process had been conducted correctly, and there was no reason to question the quality of the EER.

The only appeal lodged by the HEIs represented in the meeting with the panel was upheld by the agency. Other HEIs implemented all recommendations made in EERs.

Analysis

The panel confirms that the Complaints Policy and the Appeals Procedure are published on the agency's website and a statement about the possibility of filing an appeal is included in CYQAA Final Reports with a negative accreditation decision of the Council. The representatives of the HEIs whom the panel met were well aware that they can file a complaint or an appeal.

The panel considers that the Complaints Policy adopted by CYQAA in response to the related 2018 review recommendation complies with this standard in terms of its scope as it addresses dissatisfaction about the conduct of an evaluation process and the agency's own processes. This covers the performance of persons carrying out a process, with possible sanctions for Council members, staff or experts provided for in CYQAA's codes of conduct and declarations. Additionally, the Policy clarifies that a complaint expressing a concern about the compliance of an HEI, department or programme with the accreditation criteria may provide the basis for an additional follow-up (see ESG 2.3). In the panel's view, the procedure for handling complaints is transparent and appropriate, clearly outlining the steps to be taken by the Council, providing an opportunity for the parties concerned to present their evidence or arguments, and specifying possible consequences or sanctions. The panel found no evidence that the procedure is not rigorously followed in practice.

In the panel's view, the Appeals Procedure does not clearly state on what basis or grounds an appeal may be lodged or what can be challenged in an appeal, nor, as noted by the ACE members interviewed, does it clearly define the role of an ACE. The relevant provision of the QAA Law suggests that an HEI may challenge the original findings of an EEC. It appears, in many cases, that the HEI is appealing when it is dissatisfied with the judgement of the EEC and the subsequent decision of the Council. The panel believes that it is not good practice to attempt to relitigate the original findings of an evaluation panel. It is a well-established procedure that an appeal by an HEI against a judgement should be on a process basis, where, for example the evaluation panel or the agency allegedly exhibited misconduct during the procedure.

A decision to allow and, subsequently, to uphold or dismiss the appeal is taken by the Council, which is the same body that took the original accreditation decision challenged by the appeal. The panel is confident that the Council has extensive expertise in a wide range of thematic areas addressed in evaluations and found no evidence that the Council is not fair or impartial in its appeals decisions. However, it is an accepted principle of appeal that the body that made the original decision is not the sole arbiter of an appeal. Hence the need for an independent body to make the initial adjudication on whether a process has been breached. If necessary, such a body could be established on an ad-hoc basis for a particular evaluation procedure, while bearing in mind that the agency would need to ensure that ad-hoc bodies follow a consistent approach in considering appeals.

Furthermore, the Appeals Procedure is not entirely clear as it may suggest that an ACE is appointed for each appeal that is allowed for consideration by the Council, whereas in practice it is set up only when the Council proposes to reject an appeal and needs advice from external experts. Neither does the Procedure clarify whether in taking the final decision on an appeal, the Council can disagree with the conclusion or recommendation of an ACE.

If the arrangements recommended by the panel require legislative change to be put in place, this could form part of the ongoing process to amend the current QAA Law.

Panel recommendations

1. CYQAA should establish (if necessary, on an ad hoc basis for a particular procedure) a separate appeals panel or body to ensure that an appeal on the basis of deviation from process is considered by a body other than the Council.

Panel conclusion: partially compliant

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS

ESG 3.1: The panel commends CYQAA for the extensive involvement of international experts in its governance structure and all external evaluation committees.

ESG 3.4: The agency has invested impressive effort in producing thematic analyses reports that are effectively integrated into its regular activities.

ESG 3.5: CYQAA has highly qualified, dedicated and professional staff who clearly enjoy their work and are held in high esteem by the higher education institutions and experts that they work with.

ESG 3.6: CYQAA has in place effective mechanisms for collecting and acting upon stakeholder feedback in a continuous effort to enhance its performance.

ESG 2.1: All of the standards of Part 1 of the ESG are effectively incorporated in CYQAA's evaluation criteria and are addressed in external evaluation reports.

ESG 2.2: Within the limits set by the law, CYQAA systematically improves its evaluation methodologies in response to the feedback collected from institutions and external experts.

ESG 2.4: The involvement of international experts in all evaluations enhances the transparency of the processes and their value for institutions.

OVERVIEW OF JUDGEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the documentary and oral evidence considered by it, the review panel is satisfied that, in the performance of its functions, CYQAA is in compliance with the ESG. The panel found the agency to be compliant with ESG 3.2 (Official status), 3.4 (Thematic analysis), 3.5 (Resources), 3.6 (Internal quality assurance and professional conduct), 3.7 (Cyclical external review of agencies), and 2.1 (Consideration of internal quality assurance), 2.2 (Designing methodologies fit for purpose), 2.3 (Implementing processes), 2.4 (Peer-review experts), 2.5 (Criteria for outcomes) and 2.6 (Reporting), and partially compliant with ESG 3.1 (Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance), 3.3 (Independence) and 2.7 (Complaints and appeals).

The panel made the following recommendations:

ESG 3.1: (1) CYQAA should adopt and publish annual activity plans operationalising its multi-annual strategic plan to demonstrate to its stakeholders how its goals are translated into actions and provide a sound basis for monitoring progress towards its goals and key performance indicators. (2) CYQAA should widen the stakeholder base that it formally engages with to ensure that all the higher education institutions, including the colleges and their students, are involved in its governance and evaluation processes. For the related recommendation regarding student experts involved in evaluation processes, see ESG 2.4.

ESG 3.3: (1) Based on the changes proposed by CYQAA, the Law setting the framework for the agency's activities should be urgently amended to ensure that the agency is fully separated in operational terms from the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth and, in particular, is able to recruit its own staff and manage its own full-fledged budget covering all of its operating expenses. (2) CYQAA should propose amendments to the Law that would allow it greater autonomy in modifying its external evaluation methodologies in response to developments in higher education and the feedback collected from its stakeholders.

ESG 3.6: (1) CYQAA should close the feedback loop to external evaluation committees on their performance and on the follow-up to their recommendations in evaluation reports. (2) CYQAA should put in place a mechanism for regular evaluation of the effectiveness of its internal governance.

ESG 2.2: To reduce the burden of external quality assurance on institutions, CYQAA should continue streamlining its evaluation processes, considering, in particular, the balance of cost and benefit for universities undergoing both departmental and institutional evaluations in addition to programme evaluations, and review its evaluation criteria to eliminate any unnecessary overlap between those applied in all types of evaluation processes.

ESG 2.3: CYQAA should publish on its website clear information about the follow-up stage of evaluation processes and all follow-up reports submitted by institutions so that all stakeholders are informed on improvements made by HEIs in response to outcomes of external evaluations.

ESG 2.4: (1) CYQAA should expand membership of its external evaluation committees, in particular, for programme and departmental evaluations, to include employers representing non-regulated professions. (2) CYQAA should expand the pool from which student experts are selected to include candidates put forward by institutions other than the public universities. (3) CYQAA should provide annual training to its pool of student experts to maximise their involvement in, and contribution to external evaluations.

ESG 2.7: CYQAA should establish (if necessary, on an ad hoc basis for a particular procedure) a separate appeals panel or body to ensure that an appeal on the basis of deviation from process is considered by a body other than the Council.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENT

The panel made the following suggestions for further improvement of CYQAA:

ESG 3.1: The panel encourages CYQAA to expand its engagement with the world of work and involve employers representing non-regulated professions in its governance. For the related recommendation regarding the involvement of practitioners representing non-regulated professions in evaluation processes, see ESG 2.4.

ESG 3.4: (1) CYQAA could distribute thematic analysis reports to its experts as a useful source of information about the broader context of their external evaluations. (2) The panel encourages CYQAA to use its regular meetings with the stakeholders, including students, as an opportunity to seek their inputs in planning its future thematic analyses and identifying their topics.

ESG 2.3: CYQAA could consider including a meeting with employers in its indicative site visit agenda for programme evaluations so that external evaluation committees gather additional useful evidence on the relevance of programmes to labour market needs.

ESG 2.4: (1) A clear and published procedure for the pre-selection of students and practitioners as prospective experts by higher education institutions and professional bodies would enhance the transparency of the recruitment process. (2) CYQAA's briefings could sensitise international experts to the specific local circumstances in which different types of HEIs operate to ensure that all recommendations in evaluation reports are pertinent and practicable. (3) CYQAA is encouraged to consider how it can engage with the wider student body through higher education institutions and the national students' union to provide students with opportunities to enhance their expertise and involvement in quality assurance.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

SESSION NO.	TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW
18.09.2023			
1	18.09: 9.00-11.00 (Brussels time)	Review panel's kick-off meeting and preparations for site visit	• ENQA panel chair • ENQA panel secretary • ENQA panel member • ENQA panel student member • ENQA review coordinator
2	15.00 (Brussels time)	Online clarification meeting with the agency's resource person regarding the specific national/legal context in which an agency operates, specific quality assurance system to which it belongs and key characteristics of the agency's external QA activities.	• CYQAA Higher Administrative Officer https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89923318068
02.10.2023 – Day 0 (pre-visit)			
3	15.00 – 16.30	Pre-visit meeting with the agency's resource person to clarify any remaining questions after the online clarification meeting	• CYQAA Higher Administrative Officer • CYQAA Education Officer
	16.30-18.00	Review panel's private meeting	
03.10.2023 – Day 1			
	8.30-9.00	Review panel's private meeting	
4	9.00-9.45	Meeting with the Chair of the CYQAA Council	Chair of the CYQAA Council
	9.45-10.00	Review panel's private discussion	
6	10.00-10.45	Meeting with the working group responsible for preparation of the self-assessment report	• Chair of the CYQAA Council • CYQAA Council Member • CYQAA Higher Administrative Officer • CYQAA Education Officers
	10.45-11.00	Review panel's private discussion	
7	11.00-12.00	Meeting with the CYQAA Council	• Chair of the CYQAA Council

SESSION NO.	TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW
			• Vice Chair of the CYQAA Council • CYQAA Council Members
	12.00-12.15	Review panel's private discussion	
8	12.15-12.45	Meeting with Advisory Committees of Experts (experts involved in appeals processes)	• Professor of Fine Arts, Newcastle University • Professor of Fine Arts, University of Brighton https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87675725477
	12.45-13.45	Lunch (panel only)	
9	13.45-14.30	Meeting with the Education Officers (in charge of external QA activities) and Administrative Officers	• CYQAA Education Officers
	14.30-14.45	Review panel's private discussion	
10	14.45-15.30	Meeting with the Higher Administrative Officer / Coordinator (responsible for internal QA)	• CYQAA Higher Administrative Officer
	15.30-15.45	Review panel's private discussion	
11	15.45-16.30	Meeting with international experts (online)	• Professor, Department of Computer Science, University of Copenhagen, Denmark • Koraes Chair of Modern Greek and Byzantine History, Language and Literature, King's College London, UK • Professor of Strategic Management Accounting & Control, Ex Dean of Solvay Brussels School of Economics and Management (SBS-EM), Belgium • Professor in Industrial and Spatial Economics with Emphasis on Tourism, University of the Aegean, Greece • Professor in Leadership and Governance University of St Andrews, Scotland, UK • Dean of Medical Education (FoLSM), Co-Director of the Centre for Education, Professor of Neuropathology & Medical Education, King's College London, UK • Associate Professor, University of Aberdeen, Chemical Engineering, Scotland, UK https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87675725477

SESSION NO.	TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW
12	16.30-17.30	Wrap-up meeting among panel members and preparations for day 2	
		Dinner (panel only)	
04.10.2023 – Day 2			
	8.00-9.00	Review panel's private meeting	
13	9.00-9.45	Meeting with representatives of the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth, and the Committee for Education and Culture of the House of Representatives (*could be held online if more convenient*)	• Minister of Education, Sport and Youth • Director of Higher Education • Senior Education Officer • Higher Administrative Officer • Accounts Office • Vice-President of the Parliamentary Committee for Education and Culture
	9.45-10.00	Review panel's private discussion	
14	10.00-10.45	Meeting with heads of reviewed public HEIs/HEI representatives	• Vice Rector of Academic Affairs, University of Cyprus • Vice Rector of Academic Affairs, Open University of Cyprus • Vice-Rector of Academic Affairs, Cyprus University of Technology • Director, Mediterranean Institute of Management • Director of Studies, • Cyprus Police Academy • Senior Forestry Officer, Cyprus Forestry College • General Director, Postsecondary Institutes of Vocational Education and Training
	10.45-11.00	Review panel's private discussion	
15	11.00-11.45	Meeting with heads of reviewed private HEIs/HEI representatives	• Rector, Frederick University • Dean of the Faculty of Law, University of Nicosia • Rector, European University Cyprus • Rector, Neapolis University • President, PASISTE • President, SAISTEK • Dean, The Cyprus Institute of Neurology and Genetics

SESSION NO.	TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW
	11.45-12.00	Review panel's private discussion	
16	12.00-12.45	Meeting with quality assurance officers of HEIs	• Head of Academic Development and Quality Sector, University of Cyprus • QA Officer, Open University of Cyprus • QA Officer, University of Nicosia • Academic and Quality Assurance Officer, UCLan Cyprus • QA Officer, University of Limassol • QA Officer, Postsecondary Institutes of Vocational Education and Training • General Director, CDA College
	12.45-13.45	Lunch (panel only)	
17	13.45-14.30	Meeting with representatives from the reviewers' pool: Student Experts (current), Student Experts (former), Building infrastructure Expert, Student Affairs Expert	• Former and current student experts: (former) students of the University of Cyprus • Building Infrastructure Expert: Civil Engineer, ETEK • Student Affairs Expert, Head of Career Office, University of Cyprus
	14.30-14.45	Review panel's private discussion	
18	14.45-15.30	Meeting with stakeholders: representatives from the Pancyprian Federation of Student Unions (POFEN)	• President and Vice-President of POFEN • Representative/Member of POFEN and Member of the CYQAA Council
	15.30-15.45	Review panel's private discussion	
19	15.45-16.15	Meeting with stakeholders: international students and representatives of the Youth Board of Cyprus.	• Student, American University of Cyprus (AUC) • Student, KES College • Student, Intercollege • Acting Executive Director, Youth Board of Cyprus
	16.15-16.30	Review panel's private discussion	
20	16.30-17.00	Meeting with stakeholders: representatives from the Cyprus Scientific and Technical Chamber	• Representatives from the Cyprus Scientific and Technical Chamber • Representative/Member of the Cyprus Scientific and Technical Chamber and Member of the CYQAA Council

SESSION NO.	TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW
21	17.00-17.30	Meeting with stakeholders: representatives from professional associations and boards of regulated professions *(both regulated and non-regulated professions)*	• Representative of the Pharmaceutical Council • Director of Department of Trade, Services & Digitalisation, Cyprus Chamber of Commerce (CCCI) • Coordinator of Industrial Associations, Cyprus Employers & Industrialists Federation (OEB) • General Director, Cyprus Hotel Association • Executive Director of the Cyprus Bar Association
22	17.30-18.30	Wrap-up meeting among panel members: preparation for day 3 and provisional conclusions	
05.10.2023 – Day 3			
23	9.00-10.00	Meeting among panel members to agree on final issues to clarify	
24	10.00-11.00	Meeting with the CYQAA Council Chair and members (or key staff) to clarify any pending issues	• Chair of the CYQAA Council • Chair and Vice Chair of the CYQAA Council • CYQAA Council Members • CYQAA Higher Administrative Officer
25	11.00-12.30	Private meeting between panel members to agree on the main findings	
	12.30-13.30	Lunch (panel only)	

SESSION NO.	TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW
26	13.30-14.00	Final de-briefing meeting with staff and Council members (or key staff) of the agency to inform about preliminary findings	• Chair of the CYQAA Council • Vice Chair of the CYQAA Council • CYQAA Council Members • CYQAA Higher Administrative Officer

ANNEX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE REVIEW

External review of the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education (CYQAA) by ENQA

Annex I:

TRIPARTITE TERMS OF REFERENCE BETWEEN CYQAA, ENQA AND EQAR

April 2023

1. Background and context

The Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education (CYQAA) was established as an independent Agency (Article 26) and operates according to the provisions of "The Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education and the Establishment and Operation of an Agency on Related Matters Law" of, 2015 and its subsequent amendments.

According to its mission, the Agency is responsible to safeguard standards and to support, through the procedures provided by the relevant legislation and the principles underlying the establishment of the European Higher Education Area, the continuous improvement and upgrading of higher education institutions and their programs of study, in order to comply with the ESG and the European policy for mobility and mutual qualification recognition. It also aims at promoting quality culture within the higher education institutions in Cyprus.

CYQAA has been a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) since 2019 and is applying for ENQA renewal of membership.

CYQAA has been registered on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) since 2019 and is applying for the renewal of EQAR registration.

2. Purpose and scope of the review

This review will evaluate the extent to which CYQAA (the agency) complies with each of the standards of Parts 2 and 3 of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG) and support the agency in its efforts to continually review and enhance its work. Such an external review is a requirement for agencies wishing to apply for ENQA membership and/or for EQAR registration.

2.1 Activities of the agency within the scope of the ESG

To apply for ENQA membership and EQAR registration, this review will analyse all of the agency's activities that fall within the scope of the ESG, e.g., reviews, audits, evaluations or accreditations of higher education institutions or programmes that relate to teaching and learning (and their relevant links to research and innovation). All activities are reviewed irrespective of geographic scope (within or outside the EHEA) or whether they are obligatory or voluntary in nature.

The following activities of the agency must be addressed in the external review:

1. Institutional evaluation – accreditation

2. Departmental Evaluation – accreditation

3. Program evaluation – accreditation

4. Joint program evaluation – accreditation

5. Evaluation – accreditation of cross border education, offered by local institutions in member states or in third-party countries (Including e-learning programs of study and franchise programs of study).

2.2 Matters relevant to CYQAA's application for registration on EQAR

While the review is expected to cover all standards fully, the panel is asked to pay particular attention to those issues where the Register Committee found that CYQAA complied only partially with the ESG in its past decision, namely, to consider:

a. ESG 2.7 Complaints and appeals:

- ₋ the shortcomings related to the functioning of the Appeals Committee;
- ₋ the limited scope of the Complaints Procedure whether it allows for the possibility to address complaints related to the conduct of a review or complaints concerning the agency's own processes;
- ₋ the implementation and functioning of these procedures.

b. ESG 3.3 Independence:

- ₋ the close interlinkage between CYQAA and the Ministry of Education and Culture considering the organisational arrangements and the clear separation of CYQAA from MOEC in its staff recruitment process, infrastructure, and management.

Please consult the last decision for registration on EQAR for more information **here**[2].

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 review procedure consists of the following steps:

- Formulation of, and agreement on the Terms of Reference for the review between CYQAA, ENQA and EQAR (including publishing of the Terms of Reference on ENQA's website[3]);
- Nomination and appointment of the review panel by ENQA;
- Notification of EQAR about the appointed panel;
- Self-assessment by the agency, including the preparation and publication of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit of the agency by the review panel;
- Preparation and completion of the final review report by the review panel;
- Scrutiny of the final review report by ENQA's Agency Review Committee;
- Publication of the final review report;
- A decision from the EQAR Register Committee on the agency's registration on EQAR;
- A decision from the ENQA Board on ENQA membership;
- Follow-up on the panel's recommendations to the agency, including a voluntary progress visit.

3.1 Nomination and appointment of the review panel

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, and potentially a labour market representative (if requested). One of the members serves 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

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[2] The link in full: https://backend.deqar.eu/reports/EQAR/2019_04_A54_Approval_Decision_CYQAA.pdf
[3] The agency is encouraged to publish the ToR on its website as well.

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. In this case, an additional fee is charged to cover the reviewer's fee and travel expenses.

The panel will be supported by the ENQA Review Coordinator (an ENQA staff member) who will monitor the integrity of the process and ensure that ENQA's requirements are met throughout the process. The Review Coordinator 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 the agency with the proposed panel composition and the curricula vitarum of the panel members to establish that there are no known conflicts of interest. The reviewers will have to agree to a non-conflict of interest statement that is incorporated in their contract for the review of this agency.

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

The agency is responsible for the execution and organisation of its own self-assessment process and must adhere to 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 expected to contain:
  - a brief description of the HE and QA system;
  - the history, profile, and activities of the agency;
  - a presentation of how the agency addresses each individual standard of Parts 2 and 3 of the ESG for each of the agency's external QA activities, with a brief, critical reflection on the presented facts;
  - opinions of stakeholders;
  - the instances of partial compliance noted in the most recent EQAR Register Committee decision of inclusion/renewal and any other aspects that may have been raised by the EQAR Register Committee in subsequent change report decisions (if relevant);
  - reference to the recommendations provided in the previous review and actions taken to meet those recommendations;
  - a SWOT analysis;
  - reflections on the agency's key challenges and areas for future development.
- All the agency's external QA activities (as defined under section 2.1) are described and their compliance with the ESG is analysed in the SAR.
- The report is well-structured, concise, and comprehensive. It clearly demonstrates the extent to which the agency performs its tasks of external quality assurance and meets the ESG.

The self-assessment report is submitted to the ENQA Secretariat, which has two weeks to carry out a screening. The purpose of a screening 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 rather whether or not the necessary information, as outlined in the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews*, is present. If 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 ask for a revised version within two weeks.

The final version of the agency's self-assessment report is then submitted to the review panel a minimum of eight weeks prior to the site visit. The agency publishes the completed SAR on its website and sends the link to ENQA. ENQA will publish this link on its website as well.

3.3 A site visit by the review panel

The review panel will draft a proposal of the site visit schedule which must be submitted to the agency at least six weeks 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 must be given to the agency at least one month before the site visit to properly organise the requested interviews.

In advance of the site visit (ideally at least two weeks before the site visit), the panel will organise an obligatory online meeting with the agency. This meeting is held to ensure that the panel reaches a sufficient understanding of:

- The specific national/legal context in which the agency operates;
- The specific quality assurance system to which the agency belongs;
- The key characteristics of the agency's external QA activities.

The review panel will be assisted by the ENQA Review Coordinator during the site visit. The review coordinator will act as the panel's chief liaison with the agency, monitor the integrity of the review process and its consistency, and ensure that ENQA's overall expectations of the review are considered and met.

The site visit will close with a final debriefing meeting in which the panel outlines its general impressions and provides an overview of the judgement on the agency's ESG compliance. The panel will not comment on whether or not the agency would be granted/reconfirmed membership with ENQA or registration on EQAR.

3.4 Preparation and completion of the final review report

Based on the review panel's findings, the review secretary will draft the report in consultation with the review panel. The report will follow the purpose and scope of the review as defined under sections 2 and 2.1. It will also provide a clear rationale for the panel's findings concerning each standard of Parts 2 and 3 of the ESG. When preparing the report, the review panel should also bear in mind *EQAR's Policy on Use and Interpretation of the ESG for the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies*[4] to ensure that the report contains sufficient information for the Register Committee to consider the agency's application for registration on EQAR.

A draft will first be submitted to the ENQA Review Coordinator who will check the report for consistency, clarity, and language, and it will then be submitted to the agency – usually within 10 weeks of the site visit – for comment on factual accuracy and grave misunderstandings only. The agency will be given two weeks to do this and should not submit any additional material or documentation at this stage. Thereafter, the review panel will take into account the agency's feedback on possible factual errors and finalise and submit the review report to ENQA.

The report should be finalised within three months of the site visit and will normally not exceed 40-50 pages in length.

3.5. Publication of the report and a follow-up process

The agency will receive the review panel's report and publish it on its website once the Agency Review Committee has validated the report. The report will also be published on the ENQA website together with the statement of the Agency Review Committee validating external review reports by assessing the integrity of the review process and checking the quality and consistency of the reports. Importantly, during this process, and prior to final validation of the report, the Agency Review

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[4] Available at: https://www.eqar.eu/about/official-documents/#use-and-interpretation-of-the-esg

Committee has the option to request additional (documentary) evidence or clarification from the review panel, review coordinator or the agency if needed. The review report will be published on ENQA website regardless of the review outcome.

As part of the review's follow-up activities, the agency commits to react on the review recommendations and submit a follow-up report to ENQA within two years of the validation of the final external review report. The follow-up report will be published on the ENQA website.

The follow-up report may be complemented by an optional progress visit to the agency performed by two members of the original panel (whenever possible). The visit, which normally takes place 2-3 years after the verification of the final external review report (and after submission of the follow-up report), aims to offer an enhancement-oriented and strategically driven dialogue that ordinarily might be difficult to truly integrate in the compliance-focused site visit. The progress visit thus does not have the objective of checking the agency's ESG compliance or how the agency has followed up on the recommendations, but rather provides an arena for strategic conversations that allow the agency to reflect on its key challenges, opportunities, and priorities. Should the agency not wish to take advantage of this opportunity, it may opt out by informing the ENQA Review Coordinator about this.

4. Use of the report

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

The report is used as a basis for the Register Committee's decision on the agency's registration on EQAR. In the case of an unsuccessful application to EQAR, the report may also be used by the ENQA Board to reach a conclusion on whether the agency can be admitted/reconfirmed as a member of ENQA. The review process is thus designed to serve two purposes. In any case, the review report should only be considered final after validation by the Agency Review Committee. After submission to ENQA but before validation by the ARC, the report may not be used or relied upon by the agency, the panel, or any third party and may not be disclosed without ENQA's prior written consent. The approval of the report is independent of the decision on EQAR registration or ENQA membership.

For the purposes of EQAR registration, the agency will submit the review report (once validated by the Agency Review Committee) to EQAR via email before expiry of the agency's registration on EQAR. The agency should also include its self-assessment report (in a PDF format), a Declaration of Honour, and any other documents that may be relevant for the application (i.e., annexes, statement to the review report, updates). EQAR is expected to consider the review report and the agency's application at its Register Committee meeting as stipulated in the indicative review schedule below and before the decision on ENQA membership by the ENQA Board.

To apply for ENQA membership, the agency is also requested to provide a letter addressed to the ENQA Board outlining its motivation for applying for membership and the ways in which the agency expects to contribute to the work and objectives of ENQA during its membership. This letter will be considered by the Board together with the confirmation of EQAR listing when deciding on the agency's membership. Should the agency not be granted the registration in EQAR or the registration is not renewed, the decision on ENQA membership will be taken based on the final review report, the application letter, and the statement from the Agency Review Committee. The decision on membership will be published on ENQA's website.

5. Indicative schedule of the review

Agreement on Terms of Reference	February 2023
Appointment of review panel members	March 2023
Self-assessment completed	1 June 2023
Screening of SAR by ENQA Review Coordinator	May 2023
Preparation of the site visit schedule and indicative timetable	June 2023
Briefing of review panel members	July 2023
Review panel site visit	Early September 2023
Draft of review report and its submission to ENQA Review Coordinator for verification of its compliance with the Guidelines	November 2023
Draft of review report to be sent for a factual check to the agency	End-November 2024
Agency statement on the draft report to the review panel (if necessary)	December 2024
Submission of the final report to ENQA	January 2024
Validation of the review report by the Agency Review Committee	February 2024
Publication of report	February 2024
EQAR Register Committee meeting and initial consideration	Spring 2024
Decision on ENQA membership by the ENQA Board	April 2024

ANNEX 3: GLOSSARY

ACE	Advisory Committee of Experts (involved in an appeal process)
CBE	cross-border education
CAF	Common Assessment Framework
CYQAA	Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education
EEC	External Evaluation Committee (panel of experts conducting an external evaluation)
EER	External Evaluation Report
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQA	external quality assurance
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register
ESG	*Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, 2015
HEI	higher education institution
KPI	key performance indicator
MESY	Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
POFEN	Pancyprian Federation of Student Unions
QA	quality assurance
QAA Law	Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education and the Establishment and Operation of an Agency on Related Matters Law
SAR	self-assessment report
ToR	Terms of Reference
WFME	World Federation of Medical Education

ANNEX 4. DOCUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE REVIEW

DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY CYQAA

Self-assessment report, including annexes

Additional written clarifications requested by the panel at the preparatory stage of the review

OTHER SOURCES USED BY THE REVIEW PANEL

Documents downloaded from the CYQAA website:

- Quality Policy Statement
- Gender Equality Policy
- Privacy Policy
- Cross-border Quality Assurance - Policy and Guidelines
- Code of Deontology and Absence of Conflict of Interest (for members of the CYQAA Council), Code of Conduct and Ethics of Civil Servants (for staff), and Statutory Declaration confirming the Absence of any Conflict of Interest (for external evaluation experts)
- Application forms (including self-evaluation report templates)
- Site Visit Indicative Schedule
- Templates for External Evaluation Reports
- Templates for Follow-up Reports
- Templates for the evaluated HEIs' response to external evaluation reports
- Templates for Feedback Reports from EECs (reports prepared by each EEC based on the evaluated HEI's response to the external evaluation report)
- Templates for CYQAA Final Reports
- Guidelines for the Members of External Evaluation Committees
- Templates for contracts concluded with External Evaluation Committee members
- Thematic analysis reports: Master's programme evaluation: Trends and Dominant Issues, 2017-2018, (2019); Master e-learning programme evaluation: Trends and Dominant Issues, 2016-2019, (2019); Colleges' Short-Cycle Programme Evaluation: Trends and Dominant Issues, 2017-2018 (2019); E-learning Master's programme evaluation: Trends and Dominant Issues, 2019-2020, (2020); PhD programme evaluation, 2015-2020 (2021); and Student assessment practices in the framework of departmental evaluations, 2018-2021, (2022)
- A sample of external evaluation reports for each evaluation process included in the Terms of Reference for the review

CYQAA website

Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth website

ANNEX 5: ESG MAPPING TABLE PROVIDED IN THE SAR

ESG	CYQAA quality indicators/ criteria for Institutional Evaluation	CYQAA quality indicators/ criteria for Departmental Evaluation	CYQAA quality indicators/ criteria for Programme Evaluation: face-to-face programme	CYQAA quality indicators/ criteria for Joint-Programme Evaluation: face-to-face programme
1.1 Policy for quality assurance	1.1(1.1.1-1.1.7) 1.2(1.2.1-1.2.4) 1.3(1.3.1-1.3.6) 2.1(2.1.1-2.1.8) 2.2(2.2.1-2.2.10) 3(3.1-3.8) 6(6.1-6.11)	1.1(1.1.1-1.1.7) 1.2(1.2.1-1.2.4) 1.3(1.3.1-1.3.4) 2.1(2.1.1-2.1.6) 2.2(2.2.1-2.2.20) 3(3.1-3.11) 6(6.1-6.9)	1.1 1.2 1.3 1.4 6.1 6.2 6.3	1.1 1.2 1.3 1.4 6.1 6.2 6.3 7.1 7.2 7.3
1.2 Design and approval of programmes	1.1(1.1.1-1.1.7) 1.2(1.2.1-1.2.4) 1.3(1.3.1-1.3.6) 2.1(2.1.1-2.1.8) 2.2(2.2.1-2.2.10) 4.1(4.1.1-4.1.5) 4.2(4.2.1-4.2.5)	1.1(1.1.1-1.1.7) 1.2(1.2.1-1.2.4) 1.3(1.3.1-1.3.4) 2.1(2.1.1-2.1.6) 2.2(2.2.1-2.2.20) 4.1(4.1.1-4.1.5) 4.2(4.2.1-4.2.8)	1.1 1.2 1.3 1.4 6.1 6.2 6.3	1.1 1.2 1.3 1.4 6.1 6.2 6.3 7.1 7.2 7.3

ESG	CYQAA quality indicators/ criteria for Institutional Evaluation	CYQAA quality indicators/ criteria for Departmental Evaluation	CYQAA quality indicators/ criteria for Programme Evaluation: face-to-face programme	CYQAA quality indicators/ criteria for Joint-Programme Evaluation: face-to-face programme
1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	2.1(2.1.1-2.1.8) 2.2(2.2.1-2.2.10) 4.1(4.1.1-4.1.5) 4.2(4.2.1-4.2.5)	2.1(2.1.1-2.1.6) 2.2(2.2.1-2.2.20) 3(3.1-3.11) 4.1(4.1.1-4.1.5) 4.2(4.2.1-4.2.8) 6(6.1-6.9)	2.1 2.2 2.3 6.1 6.2 6.3	2.1 2.2 2.3 6.1 6.2 6.3 7.1 7.2 7.3
1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	1.1(1.1.1-1.1.7) 1.2(1.2.1-1.2.4) 1.3(1.3.1-1.3.6) 2.1(2.1.1-2.1.8) 2.2(2.2.1-2.2.10) 4.1(4.1.1-4.1.5) 4.2(4.2.1-4.2.5)	1.1(1.1.1-1.1.7) 1.2(1.2.1-1.2.4) 1.3(1.3.1-1.3.4) 2.1(2.1.1-2.1.6) 2.2(2.2.1-2.2.20) 4.1(4.1.1-4.1.5) 4.2(4.2.1-4.2.8)	4.1 4.2 4.3 4.4 6.1 6.2 6.3	4.1 4.2 4.3 4.4 6.1 6.2 6.3 7.1 7.2 7.3
1.5 Teaching staff	1.1(1.1.1-1.1.7) 1.2(1.2.1-1.2.4) 1.3(1.3.1-1.3.6) 5(5.1-5.9) 6(6.1-6.11)	1.1(1.1.1-1.1.7) 1.2(1.2.1-1.2.4) 1.3(1.3.1-1.3.4) 5(5.1-5.8) 6(6.1-6.9)	3.1 3.2 3.3 6.1 6.2 6.3	3.1 3.2 3.3 6.1 6.2 6.3 7.1 7.2 7.3

ESG	CYQAA quality indicators/ criteria for Institutional Evaluation	CYQAA quality indicators/ criteria for Departmental Evaluation	CYQAA quality indicators/ criteria for Programme Evaluation: face-to-face programme	CYQAA quality indicators/ criteria for Joint-Programme Evaluation: face-to-face programme
1.6 Learning resources and student support	1.1(1.1.1-1.1.7) 1.2(1.2.1-1.2.4) 1.3(1.3.1-1.3.6) 2.1(2.1.1-2.1.8) 2.2(2.2.1-2.2.10) 6(6.1-6.11) 7(7.1-7.7)	1.1(1.1.1-1.1.7) 1.2(1.2.1-1.2.4) 1.3(1.3.1-1.3.4) 2.1(2.1.1-2.1.6) 2.2(2.2.1-2.2.20) 3(3.1-3.11) 6(6.1-6.9) 7(7.1-7.7)	5.1 5.2 5.3 5.4 6.1 6.2 6.3	5.1 5.2 5.3 5.4 6.1 6.2 6.3 7.1 7.2 7.3
1.7 Information management	1.1(1.1.1-1.1.7) 1.2(1.2.1-1.2.4) 1.3(1.3.1-1.3.6) 2.1(2.1.1-2.1.8) 2.2(2.2.1-2.2.10)	1.1(1.1.1-1.1.7) 1.2(1.2.1-1.2.4) 1.3(1.3.1-1.3.4) 2.1(2.1.1-2.1.6) 2.2(2.2.1-2.2.20)	1.1 1.2 1.3 1.4 6.1 6.2 6.3	1.1 1.2 1.3 1.4 6.1 6.2 6.3 7.1 7.2 7.3
1.8 Public information	1.1(1.1.1-1.1.7) 1.2(1.2.1-1.2.4) 1.3(1.3.1-1.3.6) 2.1(2.1.1-2.1.8) 2.2(2.2.1-2.2.10)	1.1(1.1.1-1.1.7) 1.2(1.2.1-1.2.4) 1.3(1.3.1-1.3.4) 2.1(2.1.1-2.1.6) 2.2(2.2.1-2.2.20)	1.1 1.2 1.3 1.4 6.1 6.2 6.3	1.1 1.2 1.3 1.4 6.1 6.2 6.3 7.1 7.2 7.3

ESG	CYQAA quality indicators/ criteria for Institutional Evaluation	CYQAA quality indicators/ criteriafor Departmental Evaluation	CYQAA quality indicators/ criteria for Programme Evaluation: face-to-face programme	CYQAA quality indicators/ criteria for Joint-Programme Evaluation: face-to-face programme
1.9 **On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes**	1.1(1.1.1-1.1.7) 1.2(1.2.1-1.2.4) 1.3(1.3.1-1.3.6) 4.1(4.1.1-4.1.5) 4.2(4.2.1-4.2.5)	1.1(1.1.1-1.1.7) 1.2(1.2.1-1.2.4) 1.3(1.3.1-1.3.4) 4.1(4.1.1-4.1.5) 4.2(4.2.1-4.2.8)	1.1 1.2 1.3 1.4 6.1 6.2 6.3	1.1 1.2 1.3 1.4 6.1 6.2 6.3 7.1 7.2 7.3
1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance	Pursuant to the CYQAA Laws, evaluations / accreditation reviews areconducted every five years.			

<u>Explanatory note</u>: Evaluation of cross-border education provided by local HEIs in member states and third-party countries is based on the criteria for programme evaluation. In combination with the basic set of criteria for programmes, additional criteria are applied in the evaluation of e-learning, doctoral and joint programmes.

THIS REPORT presents findings of the ENQA Agency Review
of the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation
in Higher Education (CYQAA), undertaken in 2023.