

Approval of the Application by The Danish Accreditation Institution (AI) for Renewal on the Register

Register Committee

15/10/2021

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Ver. 1.0
Date 2021-10-15
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Application of:	06/05/2020
Agency registered since:	18/11/2010
External review report of:	24/06/2021
Review coordinated by:	European Association for Quality Assurance of Higher Education (ENQA)
Review panel members:	Maria E. Weber (chair), Pedro Teixeira (secretary), Luna Lee Solheim, Francisco Joaquin Jimenez Gonzalez (student)
Decision of:	15/10/2021
Registration until:	30/09/2021
Absented themselves from decision-making:	1. Jacques Lanares 2. Steffen Westergård Andersen
Attachments:	1. Minutes of telephone conversation on confirming eligibility, 18/05/2020 2. Confirmation of eligibility, 02/06/2020 3. External Review Report (external file), 24/06/2021 4. Clarification request to the Review Panel, 13/09/2021 5. Response to the clarification by the Review Panel, 28/09/2021

1. The application of 06/05/2020 adhered to the requirements of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.
2. The Register Committee confirmed eligibility of the application on 02/06/2020 having considered clarification received from the agency on 18/05/2020.
3. The Register Committee considered the external review report of 24/06/2021 on the compliance of AI with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015 version).
4. The Register Committee sought clarification from the chair of the review panel on 13/09/2021, and received response on 28/09/2021.

Analysis:

5. In considering AI's compliance with the ESG, the Register Committee took into account the following activities:

- *Institutional Accreditation (IA) of Higher Education Institutions,*
- *Programme Accreditation (PA) of Higher Education Programmes and*
- *Quality assessment of foreign programmes.*

6. *Assessment of private programmes that qualify for State Educational grant (Suvurderinger) and Assessment of the qualifications level of programmes in relation to the national qualifications framework (Niveauvurderinger)* are not within the scope of the ESG and, thus, not pertinent to the application for renewal of registration.

7. In line with its previous decisions, the Register Committee has considered AI's renewal of registration including the Accreditation Council (AC), in its capacity of decision making body in AI's accreditation procedures. The Register Committee underlined that the role, tasks and activities of AC in relation to AI and AC in general should be covered sufficiently in future evaluations.

8. The Register Committee found that the report provides sufficient evidence and analysis on AI's level of compliance with the ESG.

9. With regard to the specific European Standards, the Register Committee considered the following:

ESG 2.6 – Reporting

10. The panel noted that AI has introduced a new format that leads to shorter and more concise reports, including a summary of assessments and AC's recommendations at the beginning of the report. The review panel has noted that AI made "visible efforts to make the reports clearer and more concise".

11. The Register Committee recognised the efforts made by the agency to improve the readability of the reports, and therefore now considered the flag of its 2010 decision fully addressed. The Committee concurred with the panel's conclusion that AI complies with the standard.

ESG 2.7 – Complaints and appeals

12. The Register Committee learned that the higher educational institutions now submit appeals against the decisions made by AC to the Ministry of Higher Education and Science (instead of the Danish Agency for Universities and Internationalisation, as noted in the previous external review in 2016). The panel found that the process for appeals was now more transparent.

13. The appeals process, however, remains led by an external body. The agency is still not handling any formal complains or appeals itself. **The Register Committee concluded that the status quo in regards to the**

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standard remains unchanged since the last renewal of registration in 2016. The Committee was therefore unable to concur with the panel, but found the agency only partially compliant with the standard.

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ESG 3.1 – Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

14. AI has no advisory or governing board, nor any other strategical decision making body (hence lacks stakeholder involvement in the governance of the agency). The same organisational arrangements have been in place since AI's renewal of registration in 2016.

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15. The Register Committee further sought information on the distinction between accreditation of higher education (i.e. external quality assurance within the scope of the ESG) and other assessments of private providers outside the scope of the ESG, and the prevention of confusion between those activities. The panel clarified that the agency does not involve any external experts in the assessment procedures and the risk of confusion or misunderstanding was low, since the legal framework made a clear distinction between the two groups of providers, and that there was a clear understanding among stakeholders on the purpose of the different activities.

16. While the Committee was able to understand the distinction between agency's activities, it found that the involvement of stakeholders in the governance of the agency remains insufficient given the unchanged structure. **The Register Committee was therefore unable to concur with the panel, but upheld the partial compliance judgement on the standard.**

ESG 3.6 – Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

17. AI has adopted an overall framework for internal QA, which is publicly available. The panel, however, found that agency's approach to internal QA is often informal and flexible. This was reflected in the self-evaluation report, which the panel found to be lacking self-reflexivity and deeper analysis of agency's internal needs.

18. Moreover, the Register Committee noted that the agency has not addressed the issues that led to a partially compliant conclusion in the previous decision for renewal of registration (namely ESG 2.7 and ESG 3.1).

19. Taking in consideration the **need for more systemic and better structured management of the internal feedback and the lack of response to the issues raised in the previous external review**, the Register Committee was unable to concur with panel's conclusion and found the agency to be partially compliant with the standard.

20. For the remaining standards, the Register Committee was able to concur with the review panel's analysis and conclusion without further comments.

Conclusion:

21. Based on the external review report and the considerations above, the Register Committee concluded that AI demonstrated compliance with the ESG (Parts 2 and 3) as follows:

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Standard	Review panel conclusion	Register Committee conclusion
2.1	Substantial compliance	Compliance
2.2	Substantial compliance	Compliance
2.3	Substantial compliance	Compliance
2.4	Full compliance	Compliance
2.5	Substantial compliance	Compliance
2.6	Substantial compliance	Compliance
2.7	Substantial compliance	Partial compliance
3.1	Substantial compliance	Partial compliance
3.2	Full compliance	Compliance
3.3	Substantial compliance	Compliance
3.4	Full compliance	Compliance
3.5	Full compliance	Compliance
3.6	Substantial compliance	Partial compliance
3.7	(not expected)	Compliance (by virtue of applying)

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22. The Register Committee considered that AI only achieved partial compliance with some standards. The Committee found that the EQA system has a process for appeals and complaints in the national context, which ensures that institutions can appeal, even if not through a process situated within the agency itself as required by the standards (ESG 2.7). Moreover, while the absence of governance structures makes the agency unable to formally involve stakeholders in the way required by the standard, the Committee noted that there was no dissatisfaction with the current arrangements among Danish stakeholders (ESG 3.1). In its holistic judgement, the Register Committee therefore concluded that AI continues to comply substantially with the ESG as a whole.

23. The Register Committee therefore approved the application for renewed AI's inclusion on the Register. AI's renewed inclusion shall be valid until 30/06/2026¹.

24. The Register Committee further underlined that AI is expected to address the issues mentioned appropriately and to resolve them at the earliest opportunity.

¹ Inclusion is valid for five years from the date of the external review report, see §4.1 of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.

Application by The Danish Accreditation Institution (AI) for Renewal of Registration

Register Committee

Minutes of Telephone Conversation

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Date 2020-06-02
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Date of the conversation:	18/05/2020
Representative of AI:	Inge Enroth & Steffen Westergård Andersen
Representative of EQAR:	Melinda Szabó

1. AI has submitted on 06/05/2020 an application for renewal of registration on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).
2. In order to prepare the deliberations of the Register Committee on the eligibility of the application and AI's activities within the scope of the ESG, EQAR contacted AI via telephone to clarify the matters below.
3. AI agreed to clarify the matters by means of a telephone conversation.
4. The clarification addressed whether three of the activities on offer by AI (see under point 5, 6 and 7):
5. ***Assessment of private programmes that qualify for State Educational grant*** (Suvurderinger).
 - AI has overtaken this activity from the Danish Evaluation Institute-EVA, at the request of the Education Ministry in the past one and a half year.
 - The programmes are offered by private institutions or organisations. The intention of the assessment is to prepare a recommendation to the ministry. Based on this report the ministry decides whether a certain programme is admissible to receive a State Educational grant in Denmark.
 - The assessment follows a set of predefined processes and criteria and concern aspects related to teaching and learning i.e. the organization of the education and content, teaching methods, admission requirements etc. The agency does not involve any external experts as part of the assessment procedure.
 - Such programmes are not part of an official higher education degree and are not included in the Danish qualifications framework.
6. ***Assessment of the qualifications level of programmes in relation to the national qualifications framework*** (Niveauvurderinger).

- The level assessments were developed following the Council of the European Union's Recommendation of 22 May 2017 on the European Reference Framework for Lifelong Learning Qualifications.
 - The level assessments are meant to provide potential users and others with a better overview of the private education sector, as well as to strengthen the relation and interaction between private and public education.
 - Such an assessment is usually requested by different forms of short or longer term education providers who are not part of the official education framework in order to gain more recognition.
 - The criteria addressed in the *level assessment* is related to the learning outcomes of a programme i.e. knowledge, skills and competences. The outcome of such an assessment does not result in any form of official recognition or in an official qualification.
 - The *level assessment* is valid for four years.
7. The ***quality assessment of foreign programmes*** –is an external quality assurance activity that the Danish Accreditation Institution intends to offer in the future. The agency has not yet initiated this activity as currently, the concept and process for this type of quality assessment is under preparation.
8. The above mentioned assessments represent a small portion of the Danish Accreditation Institutions' activities.

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The Danish Accreditation Institution (AI)

Bredgade 38

Steffen Westergård Andersen

1260 København K

Russia

Brussels, 2 June 2020

Confirmation of Eligibility: Application for Inclusion on the Register Application no. A94 of 06/05/2020

Dear Steffen,

We hereby confirm that the application by the Danish Accreditation Institution (AI) for renewal of registration is eligible.

Based on the information and draft terms of reference provided, the external review coordinated by European Association for Quality Assurance of Higher Education (ENQA) fulfils the requirements of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.

We confirm that the following activities of AI are within the scope of the ESG:

- Institutional Accreditation (IA) of Higher Education Institutions
- Programme Accreditation (PA) of Higher Education Programmes

Please ensure that AI's self-evaluation report covers all the aforementioned activities.

In the application form, AI did not include "*quality assessment of foreign programmes*". Having considered the clarification by AI (see attached minutes) the Register Committee understood that the activity can be considered an external QA activity within the scope of the ESG. While the procedure for the quality assessment of foreign programmes are under preparation, the Register Committee underlined that the activity should thus be considered to the extent it is ready at the time of the site-visit and should thus be included in the external review of AI. If the activity is to be developed well in advance of AI's external review, the agency is requested (per EQAR policy) to submit also submit a change report¹.

In the application form, AI stated that it did not consider the following activities to be within the scope of the ESG:

¹ For more information on submitting a change report, visit EQAR's website at: <https://www.eqar.eu/register/substantive-change-report/>

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- *Assessment of private programmes that qualify for State Educational grant (Suvurderinger).*
- *Assessment of the qualifications level of programmes in relation to the national qualifications framework (Niveauvurderinger).*

The Register Committee noted that these activities are outside the scope of the ESG as they do not lead to a higher education degree. Considering however the similarity of these assessments with external QA activities within the scope of the ESG i.e. using predefined processes and criteria and assessing aspects related to teaching and learning, the Register Committee underlined the risk of confusion with other activities within the scope of the ESG.

The self-evaluation and the external review report should therefore address how the agency ensures a clear and transparent distinction between AI's *assessment activities* (of private programmes and the qualification level of programmes) and its *accreditation activities* within the scope of the ESG, taking into account Annex 5 to the Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG ².

We further remind you that AI was found to comply only partially with the following standards when AI's registration was last renewed; the issues related thereto should be specifically addressed in your self-evaluation report and the external review report:

ESG 2.6 – Reporting

While the agency is compliant in terms of accessibility and publication of reports, the Register Committee noted that the readability of reports is limited to a specialised audience.

ESG 2.7 - Complaints and Appeals

Given the lack of a formalised procedure for appeals the Register Committee underlined higher education institutions reviewed by AI may not question the formal outcomes of the agency's reports, judgments or recommendations. The Committee further noted the lack of a transparent formal procedure that allows institutions to complaint about the process and the conduct of the process and those carrying it out.

ESG 3.1 - Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

The Committee noted the lack of stakeholder involvement in its governance and work of the agency.

While the application for renewal of registration was made by AI, we note that the Accreditation Council is an integral part of the accreditation

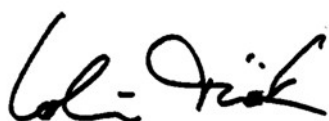
² To access the Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG please visit EQAR's website:
https://eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/eqar/official/RC_12_1_UseAndInterpretationOfTheESG_v2_0.pdf

system, as the accreditation body for all of AI's external QA activities. In case the application is successful, the Accreditation Council – would become de facto part of AI's registration on EQAR and thus be affected by the resulting rights and obligations.

We will forward this letter to European Association for Quality Assurance of Higher Education (ENQA) in its capacity of the coordinator of the external review. At the same time we underline that it is AI's responsibility to ensure that the coordinator and review panel take account of the present confirmation, so as to ensure that all activities mentioned are analysed by the panel.

This confirmation is made according to the relevant provisions of the EQAR Procedures for Applications. AI has the right to appeal this decision in accordance with the Appeals Procedure; any appeal must reach EQAR within 90 days from receipt of this decision

Yours sincerely,



Colin Tück
(Director)

Cc: ENQA (coordinator)

Maria E. Weber

– by email: maria.weber@daq.ac.at –

Brussels, 14 September 2021

Application by AI for Renewal of Registration on EQAR

Dear Maria E, Weber,

The AI - The Danish Accreditation Institute (AI) has made an application for renewal of registration on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

We are contacting you in your capacity as chair of the panel that prepared the external review report of 24/06/2021 on which AI's application is based.

We kindly ask you to clarify the following matters to inform the Register Committee's consideration and decision-making:

In its eligibility confirmation, the Register Committee underlined the existing similarities and the risk of confusion between AI's external quality assurance activities within the scope of the ESG (accreditation activities) and AI's assessments of private programmes and assessment of the qualifications level of programmes (assessment activities).

From the review report, the Register Committee's understood that AI primarily makes distinction between EQA and other activities depending on who takes the final decision.

Could you please clarify how the panel considered matters such as the prevention of conflict of interests, clear communication of the purpose and outcomes, avoiding the risk of confusion in the use of similar terminology etc. (ESG 3.1) in making further distinction between the accreditation and assessment activities?

We would be grateful if it was possible for you to respond by 24/09/2021, and we would appreciate if you get in contact with us should that not be feasible.

Please note that EQAR will publish this request and your response together with the final decision on AI's application. We, however, kindly

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ask you to keep information related to the application confidential until the final decision has been published.

We acknowledge that it might not be possible to clarify all of the above. However, we appreciate your assistance and I shall be at your disposal if you have any questions in relation to this request.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Colin Tück".

Colin Tück
(Director)

Cc: Pedro Teixeira (Secretary)
ENQA (coordinator)
AI

Dear Aleksandra,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide additional information regarding how the panel considered matters such as the prevention of conflict of interests, clear communication of the purpose and outcomes, avoiding the risk of confusion in the use of similar terminology etc. (ESG 3.1) in making further distinction between the accreditation and assessment activities. Please find below the panel's response to your letter dated 14 September 2021, issued in Brussels.

As mentioned in the panel's report AI has developed certain activities outside the scope of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). These revenue-funded activities introduced in 2018 with the latest amendments to the 2013 Accreditation Act, involve a very limited number of programmes of private HEI, and represent a small portion of AI activities. The holistic outline of the report (ERR) clearly provides evidence that there is a distinction between – accreditation (within ESG) and assessment activities (outside ESG). In addition, activities outside the scope of ESG were kept short and brief in the SAR and as well in the review process has a whole. This for a good reason.

One of the amendments to the law, based on which AI/AC operates, states that AI could carry out assessment tasks as revenue-funded activities in two areas: assessment of private programmes that qualify for the State Educational Grant and assessment of the qualifications level of programmes in relation to the national Qualifications Framework. The former concerns a limited number of private programmes that do not lead to a formal degree and is a process that AI has taken from EVA in early 2019 and is shared with MHES, which uses the outcomes to decide whether a certain programme is admissible to students receiving the State Educational Grant in Denmark. The latter type of activity involves assessing the intended learning outcomes of private programmes (i.e. knowledge, skills and competences). These assessments usually requested by different forms of short- or long-term private education providers wanting to make the level of the intended learning outcomes of the learning activity or course in question visible. The assessments meant to provide potential users and others with a better overview of the private education sector as well as to strengthen the relation and interaction between private and public education. The outcome of these assessments do not lead to any form of official recognition nor official qualification. AI explained that the AC (accreditation council) is not involved in these activities, since no formal decisions are taken.

Because of the legal framework (defining work / scope of AI/AC), the panel did not identify any existing similarities and risks of confusion between AI's EQA (within the scope of ESG) and it's (since 2018) revenue-funded activities (outside the scope of ESG). Given the fact that HE in Denmark is primarily defined by public HEI, the focus of EQA activities (accreditation AI) lies on public HEIs; all further activities (revenue-funded) focus on private HEI/private programmes.

The panel concluded that because of the guidance provided by the law, concerns of conflict of interests etc. are, as for now, rather reduced into hypothetical concerns. In addition, AI has not conducted a significant number of such revenue-funded activities (timeframe 2018-2020). The panel decided to draw attention on AI's revenue-funded activities in an adequate manner. In its preparation for the review, and during the review the panel tried to clarify open issues on these activities outside the scope of the ESG. AI

itself addressed these activities briefly in its SAR. It was further explained i.e. that AI does not involve any external experts in these activities; AI follows predefined processes and criteria as well for these activities related to teaching and learning (i.e. the organization of the education programme and content, teaching methods, admission requirements, etc.). On the other hand, this type of assessment activity involves the assessment of intended learning outcomes of the programme (i.e. knowledge, skills and competences). As stated in the ERR these assessments are usually requested by different forms of short- or long-term private education providers wanting to make the level of the intended learning outcomes of the learning activity or course in question visible. Given the fact that these revenue-funded activities (outside the scope of ESG) deal with (private) programmes, HEI provision and aspects derived from teaching/learning/learning-outcome etc. it is not avoidable to use similar terminology as used in activities within the scope of ESG. Hence, the risk of confusion is limited, since the legal framework anyhow makes the difference (scope/aim/frame) of these activities clear.

Nevertheless, with regard to private institutions in Denmark the panel emphasized (in the ERR) that, depending on the future development of private institutions, it might be pertinent for AI to explore possibilities regarding (voluntary) forms of external quality assurance for such providers and their programmes that may address key elements of the ESG.

Please let me know if there is a need for further clarification.

With kind regards,

Maria E. Weber