

Approval of the Application by Enhancing Quality in the Arts (EQ-Arts) for Inclusion on the Register

Register Committee
18 March 2021

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| Application of: | 30/10/2020 |
| External review report of: | 14/09/2018 (full) and 31/01/2021 (focused) |
| Review coordinated by: | European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) |
| Review panel members: | Maria E. Weber (chair), Amanda Bright (academic), Gohar Hovhannisyan (student) |
| Decision of: | 18/03/2021 |
| Registration until: | 30/09/2023 |
| Absented themselves from / decision-making: | |
| Attachments: | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Confirmation of eligibility, 23/11/2020 2. External Review Report, 31/01/2021 (separate file) 3. Request to the Review Panel, 05/03/2021 4. Clarification by the Review Panel, 16/03/2021 |

1. The application of 30/10/2020 adhered to the requirements of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.
2. Following the Register Committee's decision of 19/06/2019 to reject the initial application by EQ-Arts for registration, EQ-Arts made use of the possibility to undergo a focused review according to §3.21 of the EQAR Procedures. The Register Committee confirmed eligibility of the application on 23/11/2020.
3. The Register Committee considered the focused external review report of 31/01/2021 on the compliance of EQ-Arts with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015 version).
4. The Register Committee sought and received clarification from the chair of the review panel.

Analysis:

5. In considering EQ-Arts's compliance with the ESG, the Register Committee took into account:
 - *Quality assurance activities (accreditation and revalidation)*

- *including joint quality assurance in partnership with (national or sectoral) EQAR-registered agencies;*
- *Quality enhancement reviews*

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6. The Register Committee found that the report provides sufficient evidence and analysis on EQ-Arts's level of compliance with those aspects of the ESG that lead to a conclusion of partial compliance following the initial review.

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

ESG 2.4 – Peer-review experts

8. In its previous decision, the Register Committee concluded that students were not involved consistently, as an exception was made in the review of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, KASK, in Ghent, at the institution's request.

9. The review panel's report contained no analysis of the factors that led to that departure from EQ-Arts' own policies, but confirmed that all reviews since December 2018 have included students (8 reviews in 2019 and 1 in 2020); the panel further elaborated on EQ-Arts approach to recruiting and training experts.

10. **The Register Committee was now able to concur with the panel's conclusion that EQ-Arts complies with the standard.**

ESG 2.5 – Criteria for outcomes

11. During 2019 and 2020, EQ-Arts completed 9 further reviews, of which 2 were quality assurance (formal assessment) and 7 quality enhancement reviews.

12. The panel was convinced that EQ-Arts had “developed a sound approach to guarantee fair and transparent decisions and judgments”; it noted that consistency was ensured by a template with guidelines, the executive officer supporting each expert team and the Board considering each report.

13. The Register Committee asked the panel to elaborate on its discussion and analysis of these instruments. In its response, the panel elaborated on the measures taken to ensure consistency and how reviewers are being familiarised with them in EQ-Arts' trainings. The panel explained how it triangulated the information received from the reviewers, the reviewed institutions and the EQ-Arts Board. The panel confirmed that there was a “consistent understanding of procedure and process”. Based on the increased amount of activities, the panel was satisfied that EQ-Arts criteria were applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision by the Board.

14. **Having considered the panel's clarification, the Register Committee was able to concur with the conclusion that EQ-Arts complies with the standard.**

ESG 3.1 – Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

15. In its 19/06/2019 decision, the Register Committee was unable to identify a specific provision in EQ-Arts' suite of documents that rules out the possibility of reviewing an institution or programme that was previously consulted by EQ-Arts.

16. The review panel pointed out that consultancy "in the very narrow meaning" was never an activity of EQ-Arts, but attributed a misunderstanding to the fact that this was not explicitly excluded. The report noted that it would be against EQ-Arts' principles to engage in paid consultancy work (p. 31), this was now explicitly ruled out in the Governance Framework.

17. The Register Committee considered that the issue has been addressed for consultancy in the classical meaning, i.e. paid services provided to institutions. The Committee therefore now concurred with the panel's conclusion that EQ-Arts complies with the standard.

18. The Register Committee nevertheless underlined that EQ-Arts needs to be mindful for all other current or future activities with individual higher education institutions – whether paid or unpaid – if they could be regarded as compromising its ability to make an independent assessment of that institution later on and, if so, to make adequate provisions to rule out carrying out a review of that institution.

19. In addition, the next external review of EQ-Arts should analyse whether any risk lies in the fact that the same higher education institutions might undergo an enhancement review first and request a formal assessment later, depending on whether such patterns occur in practice.

ESG 3.3 – Independence

20. In its previous decision, the Register Committee had considered that the recruitment and appointment of EQ-Arts Board members was not sufficiently transparent, as it took place without a public call or criteria.

21. The review panel noted that EQ-Arts' statutes were reviewed in order to reorganise its Board and allow for the inclusion of students. Moreover, the Board and Executive Group were merged. The Governance Framework defined the composition and responsibilities of the Board, as well as the criteria for Board membership (p.34).

22. The panel reported that a call for Board members was issued in May 2020 and addressed to relevant subject-specific stakeholder organisations; on that basis, the Board members were selected.

23. The Register Committee considered that the new arrangements improved transparency and therefore concurred with the panel's conclusion that EQ-Arts complies with the standard.

24. The Committee was unable to verify whether the nomination arrangements apply only to initial nominations or also to re-appointments.

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In the interest of assuring a regular link with the sector, the Committee encouraged EQ-Arts to ask for nominations also for re-appointments.

ESG 3.4 – Thematic analysis

25. Even though EQ-Arts had started work on thematic analyses, these were previously not published.

26. The review panel noted that EQ-Arts developed a framework for analysing and sharing the outcomes of its external quality assurance activities, taking place on a triennial basis. (p. 36). Its first thematic analysis report was published in September 2020; it draws on findings of 14 reports since 2016.

27. **The Register Committee concurred with the review panel that EQ-Arts now complies with the standard.**

ESG 3.5 – Resources

28. The 2018 external review discussed that EQ-Arts' financial situation was volatile. While the resources were sufficient to sustain the (currently) small number of reviews, the medium-term perspective was not clear.

29. The panel reported that staff increased to 1.3 FTE in 2019, then fell to 0.5 FTE as result of the Covid-19 pandemic and a drop in activities.

30. While the panel found that the “agile and collaborative approach” assured that workload could be handled, the Register Committee considered that the resources of EQ-Arts remain highly volatile; this has not changed since the initial review.

31. **The Register Committee was therefore unable to concur with the panel's conclusion, but considered that EQ-Arts only partially complies with the standard.**

32. For the remaining standards, the Register Committee upheld the analysis and conclusions of its decision of 19/06/2019, based on the initial external review report of 14/09/2018.

Conclusion:

33. Based on the initial external review report of 14/09/2018, the Register Committee had concluded in its decision of 19/06/2019 that EQ-Arts demonstrated compliance with the ESG (Parts 2 and 3) as follows:

| Standard | Review panel conclusion | Register Committee conclusion |
|----------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 2.1 | Substantial compliance | Compliance |
| 2.2 | Full compliance | Compliance |
| 2.3 | Substantial compliance | Compliance |
| 2.4 | Substantial compliance | Partial compliance |
| 2.5 | Full compliance | Partial compliance |
| 2.6 | Substantial compliance | Compliance |

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| 2.7 | Substantial compliance | Compliance |
| 3.1 | Substantial compliance | Partial compliance |
| 3.2 | Full compliance | Compliance |
| 3.3 | Substantial compliance | Partial compliance |
| 3.4 | Partial compliance | Partial compliance |
| 3.5 | Partial compliance | Partial compliance |
| 3.6 | Substantial compliance | Compliance |
| 3.7 | (not expected) | Compliance (by virtue of applying) |

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34. Based on the focused external review report and the considerations above, the Register Committee concluded that EQ-Arts now demonstrated compliance with the standards in focus as follows:

| Standard | Review panel conclusion | Register Committee conclusion |
|----------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 2.4 | Substantial compliance | Compliance |
| 2.5 | Substantial compliance | Compliance |
| 3.1 | Substantial compliance | Compliance |
| 3.3 | Substantial compliance | Compliance |
| 3.4 | Substantial compliance | Compliance |
| 3.5 | Substantial compliance | Partial compliance |

35. The Register Committee considered that EQ-Arts only achieved partial compliance with one standard. In its holistic judgement, the Register Committee considered that the volatile resource situation is understandable for a young agency that operates nearly entirely based on voluntary reviews. The Committee therefore concluded that EQ-Arts complies substantially with the ESG as a whole.

36. The Register Committee approved the application for inclusion on the Register. EQ-Arts's inclusion shall be valid until 30/09/2023¹.

37. The Register Committee further underlined that EQ-Arts 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 initial (full) external review report, see §3.17 and §3.21 of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.




Terms of Reference for the ECA ESG Focused Review of the European Quality Enhancement Agency for the Arts (EQ-Arts)


The European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA) and the European Quality Enhancement Agency for the Arts (EQ-Arts) agree that:

1. ECA will coordinate a focused review of EQ-Arts to determine the level of compliance of EQ-Arts with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) 2.4, 2.5, 3.1, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5. An external focused review which shows substantial compliance with abovementioned ESG is necessary for inclusion in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR). EQ-Arts aims to submit the review documents to EQAR by 29th January 2021.
2. The ESG focused review (see 1.) is set up in accordance with the requirements of EQAR. The ESG focused review is based on:
 - a. A self-evaluation report and supporting documents provided by EQ-Arts. The self-evaluation report should reflect on the compliance with each of the ESG standards 2.4, 2.5, 3.1, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5. It should be a critical reflection on the issues specified by EQAR in the report issued on the 24 June 2019 in which the application of EQ-ARTS was rejected. ECA have received the self-evaluation report from EQ-Arts by 15 July 2020;
 - b. A virtual visit to EQ-Arts by a panel of independent experts to verify that the self-evaluation report presents an accurate account and to enable the assessment by the panel regarding the level of compliance of EQ-Arts to the abovementioned ESG. The visit will take place on 27 November 2020 by virtual means and consist of interviews with representatives of the EQ-Arts Board, staff, reviewers of EQ-Arts, institutions reviewed by EQ-Arts, and other external stakeholders.
3. To carry out the external review, the Board of ECA will appoint a panel consisting of the following independent experts, in line with EQAR requirements and after consultation of EQ-Arts:
 - Maria E. Weber, Head of Department of Accreditation & International Affairs, Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria), Austria. Chair and secretary of the panel.
 - Amanda Bright. Head of the School of Art. University of Brighton. Academic member.
 - Gohar Hovhannisyan. Vice President. ESU. Student member.
4. The Board of ECA will verify that all panel members are fully independent of EQ-Arts and have no real or apparent conflicts of interest with regard to EQ-Arts. Furthermore, the Board of ECA will ensure that the panel members have received prior training or instructions for carrying out the focused review, in particular with regard to the "EQAR policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG". The panel members will sign a No-Conflict-Of-Interest Declaration and submit their full CVs to ECA. The chair of the panel

should agree to be available for answering questions regarding the focused review if this will be desired by EQAR.

5. The ECA Coordinator is the contact person for the review and acts as liaison for EQ-Arts, the panel, the ECA Board and EQAR. The ECA Coordinator monitors the fulfilment of the Terms of Reference and accompanies the panel to the virtual visit taking notes but without participating in making judgements on the ESG.
6. After the virtual visit the panel will compose a report which consists of a review against the ESG 2.4, 2.5, 3.1, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5. The focused review report will provide clear evidence, analysis and conclusions for each standard separately.
7.  The focused review report will be sent to EQ-Arts for comments on factual accuracy before 31 December 2020. EQ-Arts will respond before 15 January 2020 after which the panel will finalise the report. The final focused review report shall be agreed upon by all panel members, although it might reflect majority judgements or opinions on issues where there was no unanimity. The report shall be submitted together with all annexes and dissenting opinions where such exist. The report will be agreed exclusively by the panel and be in the panel's name. The Board of ECA will neither interfere with the panel judgements nor the content of the panel report.
8. ECA charges a fee of 8,000 euro to cover the platform and honoraria for the panel members and the costs of the review coordination by ECA. EQ-Arts agrees to pay 50% of the fee to ECA upon signing the TOR and the remaining 50% within 2 weeks of the receipt of the focused review report and the accompanying invoice.
9. EQ-Arts is responsible for the practical organization of the virtual visit; this includes arranging interviews as specified by the panel. The interviews will be developed via Zoom. ECA will organize the virtual spaces for each interview and provide the links to the meetings.
10. Any disagreement on the interpretation of the Terms of Reference will be settled by mutual consent. If a disagreement cannot be solved by mutual consent then Dutch law will apply in case of any legal settlements or procedures.

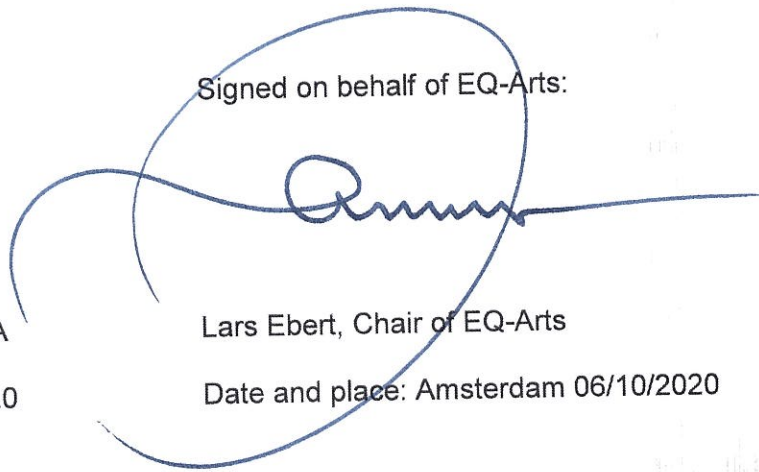
Signed on behalf of ECA:



Dr. Maciej Markowski, Chair of ECA

Date and place: Warsaw 06/10/2020

Signed on behalf of EQ-Arts:



Lars Ebert, Chair of EQ-Arts

Date and place: Amsterdam 06/10/2020

Brussels, 5 March 2021

Application by EQ-Arts for Inclusion on EQAR

Dear Maria,

EQ-Arts - Enhancing Quality in the Arts (EQ-Arts) has made an application for inclusion 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 focused external review report of 31/01/2021 on which EQ-Arts' application is based.

The EQAR Register Committee's rapporteurs have been considering the application and the external review report. We would be obliged if you could clarify, in consultation with the panel members as necessary, one matter in order to contribute to the consideration of EQ-Arts' application:

1. With regard to **criteria for outcomes (ESG 2.5)** and their consistent application, your report referred to predefined templates, support by the EQ-Arts executive office to each expert team, briefing and decision-making by the EQ-Arts Board on reports.

Could you please elaborate on the panel's analysis – e.g. based on your interviews of evaluated institutions and expert panel members, or an analysis of recent EQ-Arts reports – of the effectiveness of these approaches in ensuring consistent and rigorous decisions based on EQ-Arts standards?

European Quality Assurance
Register for Higher Education
(EQAR) aisbl

Aarlenstraat 22 rue d'Arlon
1050 Brussels
Belgium

Phone: +32 2 234 39 12

Fax: +32 2 230 33 47

info@eqar.eu

www.eqar.eu

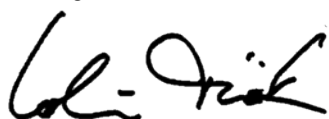
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We would be grateful if it was possible for you to respond **by 14 March 2020**, and we would appreciate if you get in contact with us should that not be feasible.

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



Colin Tück
(Director)

Cc: ECA (coordinator)
EQ-Arts



Vienna, 14 March 2021

Dear Colin,

After consultation with the review panel members, please find below our clarification on

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| 2.5 Criteria for outcomes | <p><i>„(...) 1. With regard to criteria for outcomes (ESG 2.5) and their consistent application, your report referred to predefined templates, support by the EQ-Arts executive office to each expert team, briefing and decision-making by the EQ-Arts Board on reports.</i></p> <p><i>Could you please elaborate on the panel's analysis – e.g. based on your interviews of evaluated institutions and expert panel members, or an analysis of recent EQ-Arts reports – of the effectiveness of these approaches in ensuring consistent and rigorous decisions based on EQ-Arts standards? (...) (as of letter from 5 March 2021)</i></p> |
|---------------------------|---|

as follows:

Based on the evidence provided in EQ-Arts' self-evaluation report (SER) and documentation, the interviews during the online site-visit with various stakeholders (see: agenda / part of the review report - EQ-Arts Board members, EQ-Arts team, trained EQ-Arts experts, representatives from higher education institutions under review) as a review panel we are confident that the reviews conducted by EQ-Arts are done so in a consistent way, and are based on a consistent application of standards and sound decision-making.

The review panel is confident that the experts' reports are relevant and insightful in terms of and for *Creative and Performing Arts and Design education* (CPAD). Representatives of programmes referred to the much appreciated 'deep dive' as part of the review process. They found this especially beneficial with expert panels demonstrating - as peers in the field - a profound understanding not only of the standards applied, but also the relevant field-specific understanding (e.g. background in CPAD education).

Representatives from programmes also reported that prior to procedures conducted, members of the EQ-Arts team support them with an understanding of standards applied and requirements to be delivered for a review based on the published framework. This enables the review process to start with a thorough reflection on standards and requirements and for SERs to be structured in an efficient manner.

As outlined in our report, EQ-Arts has well-defined processes and procedures in place for training, appointing, and nominating expert panels. Interviewed trained experts referred to/used the term 'boot camp' when describing the highly appreciated, EQ-Arts experts' training. The core focus of this training is to familiarise future reviewers with the EQ-Arts framework and the review process in order to enable them to work through a series of scenarios so that reviewers share an understanding and points of reference for parity. Intensive training experiences are followed by tailor-made briefings for individual reviews once an expert is appointed and nominated for a review. As for our understanding, EQ-Arts aims with all the measures set, clearly at sharing understanding and (re-)clarifying of contents introduced overall to during the reported intensive training sessions. EQ-Arts strives for the creation of a supportive environment for its expert panels in each review. Experts are confident that they are undertaking a review from the same consistent basis as another expert panel. Based upon the support



provided from EQ-Arts, experts' reports form a sound basis for decision-making in the remit of the Board members responsibility.

The Board is also responsible for ensuring that all work conducted by expert panels under the auspices of EQ-Arts complying with set working principles, ethics, framework and standards. The Board is responsible for ensuring that reports are evidence-based, comprehensive and that standards are applied and assessed in a consistent manner. Each report is submitted to the Board, which makes its decisions concerning recommendations, conditions, and accreditation based on the reports received from the expert panels. The interviews with Board members demonstrated to the review panel that all members share the same in-depth understanding of reports on which they have to make decisions. The Board has described in very details the process of their decision-making. Eventually not relevant for the particular need for clarification, but consistency has been indicated as an important topic for EQ-Arts to further thematic analysis.

According to the above mentioned, we - the review panel 'triangulated' the information received from the different sides - the reviewers, the 'reviewed' and the decision-makers, and saw a consistent understanding of procedure and process. Based on the interviews held, the review panel is confident that the expert panel members who had had a review undertaken under the auspice EQ-Arts, spoke of their experience with the same understanding as representatives from reviewed programmes. All stated was mirrored as well by representatives from EQ-Arts or vice-versa.

Therefore, in addition to the information stated in the review report, we wish to underline that all reviews undertaken during the last years have been based on explicit and published criteria, applied consistently by trained experts, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision by the Board. Formal outcomes and the reports of any quality assurance exercise undertaken by EQ-Arts are published on the website. EQ-Arts has demonstrated its capacity towards professional, transparent, consistent and accountable conduct via an increase of activities since the full review 2018.

I hope that this additional clarification supports the on-going work of EQAR's Register Committee. In case there is a need for further clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.

With kind regards,

Maria E. Weber