Report on the External Evaluation of the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria

May 2014

CONTENTS

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report addresses the extent to which the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria) complies with the membership criteria of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and, therefore, with the *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance* (ESG) in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). It is based on a review process initiated by ENQA at the request of the AQ Austria. The review process included self-evaluation by AQ Austria and a site visit which took place in Vienna between 3-5 March 2014.

AQ Austria was founded in 2011 as part of the restructuring policy of the external quality assurance (EQA) system in Austria. Essentially speaking, three former quality assurance organisations (the Universities of Applied Sciences Council, *Fachhochschulrat*, FHR; the Austrian Accreditation Council, *Österreichischer Akkreditierungsrat*, ÖAR; and the Austrian Quality Assurance Agency *Österreichische Qualitätssicherungsagentur*, AQA) were incorporated and merged into AQ Austria in 2012.

In accord with its legal mandate, AQ Austria is responsible for EQA in almost all post-secondary higher education institutions (HEIs) in Austria (public universities, universities of applied sciences, private universities, with the exception of university colleges of teacher education, the Institute of Science and Technology Austria (IST Austria), and universities of philosophy and theology). The Agency's remit comprises a vast array of legally regulated functions, which encompasses the accreditation of HEIs and their programmes (private universities and universities of applied sciences), audits of internal quality management systems (public universities and universities of applied sciences), consultancy, studies and system wide analyses, as well as carrying out audits for non-Austrian HEIs.
Since its foundation in 2011, AQ Austria has started 26 accreditation processes in the universities of applied sciences sector, 13 accreditation processes in the private university sector, one process outside Austria (system accreditation), and 6 audit processes. At the time of the completion of this report, most of processes were still ongoing. Additionally, 16 accreditation processes abroad are on the way and they should be mentioned.
AQ Austria is committed to the continuous improvement of its own processes and operates in a manner consistent with good international and European practice, including the ESG. It has an international profile and is active in continuing the international activities of its predecessor organisations, especially in Germany and the Balkans. As the successor of ÖAR and FHR, AQ Austria is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and other international

networks. Its area of operations encompasses Austria and other European and non-European countries.

AQ Austria has been full member of ENQA since 2012 as the successor of the former institutions, ÖAR and FHR, who were full members of ENQA by that time. According to ENQA policy, AQ Austria had to be reviewed before two years from the merging date against ENQA membership criteria.

This report contains the observations and conclusions of an external review panel (henceforth referred to as the Panel) set up for the evaluation of the AQ Austria for the following purpose:

- compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) as a core requirement for continued membership of the ENQA.

This external evaluation will also be used as a basis for the request to be admitted into the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies (EQAR).

The Panel carefully considered a range of documents and oral evidence which led to judgements of full compliance with the ENQA membership criteria 2, 3, 5, 6 and 8, and of substantial compliance with criteria 1, 4 and 7.

The Panel was appreciative of the courtesy and efficiency of the employees of AQ Austria Secretariat who supported the review and the visit.

Almost all the documentation requested was provided either in advance of the meeting or while at the AQ Austria Secretariat.

2. GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

AQ Austria	Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria
AQA	Austrian Quality Assurance Agency
BMWF	Federal Ministry of Science and Research
BWSF	Advisory Council for Economic and Social Affairs
DUK	Danube University Krems
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQA	External Quality assurance
EQAR	European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance
ESU	European Students' Union
FH	University of Applied Sciences
FHK	Association of Austrian Universities of Applied Sciences
FHR	Universities of Applied Sciences Council
FHStG	Federal Act on University of Applied Sciences Degree Programmes (University of Applied Sciences Studies Act)
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HS-QSG	Federal Act on External Quality Assurance in Higher Education and the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education)
IST Austria	Institute of Science and Technology Austria
IQA	Internal Quality Assurance
ÖAR	Austrian Accreditation Council
ÖH	Austrian National Union of Students
ÖPUK	Austrian Private Universities' Conference
PUG	Federal Act on Private Universities (Private University Act)
QSRG	Quality Assurance Framework Law
UG	Federal Act on the Organisation of Universities and their Studies (Universities Act 2002)

UniAkkG	Federal Act on the Accreditation of Educational Institutions as Private Universities (University Accreditation Act)
UNIKO	Universities Austria
VSPU	Association for the Establishment and Promotion of National Student Representation of Private Universities
SEG	Self-Evaluation Group of the Institutional Evaluation Programme (of the European University Association)
SER	Self-Evaluation Report

3. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE REVIEW PROCESS

3.1. Introduction

This is a type A review, as defined in the *Guidelines for external reviews of quality assurance agencies in the European Higher Education Area*. It evaluates the way in which and to what extent the AQ Austria fulfils the criteria for membership in the *European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education* (ENQA) and, thus, the *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance* (ESG).

This report contains the observations and conclusions of the Panel set up for the evaluation of the AQ Austria for the following purpose:

- compliance with the ESG as a core requirement for continued membership of the ENQA.

The evaluation process spanned from mid 2012 to 2014. The Panel's site visit took place in Vienna between 3-5 March 2014, and led to observations and conclusions that are broadly in line with those presented in the QA Austria's Self-Evaluation Report (SER). The Panel's work also draws extensively on open and informative discussions held with the different groups of actors and stakeholders involved in the ongoing process of shaping a suitable quality assurance system for Austria Higher Education sector.
The Panel was impressed by the high level of commitment of all persons and groups involved in the evaluation process. All panel members are appreciative of and grateful for their efforts and hard work.

3.1.1. Austrian higher education and quality assurance

3.1.1.1. Austrian higher education

Higher education in Austria is offered at several types of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) through different types of educational programmes and approaches:

- universities focus on academic and scientific research – particularly basic research – in a wide range of disciplines at all levels of higher education, including doctoral study levels;
- universities of applied sciences are oriented mainly towards application-oriented studies and research;
- university colleges of teacher education;

- post-graduate education in the form of PhD programmes and postdoctoral programmes at the Institute of Science and Technology Austria (IST Austria).

According to the AQ Austria's SER, in the winter semester of 2012 HEIs in Austria included:

a) 22 public universities, including the Danube University Krems (DUK); academic research, the development and improvement of the arts, and research-led academic teaching constitute the strategic duties of public universities, which aim to create new academic knowledge and fields;
b) 11 private universities that align their activities with the principle of freedom of scientific research, freedom of artistic creativity, the transfer of arts and its teaching, the connection between research and teaching, and the diversity of academic and artistic theories, methods and scientific doctrines;
c) 21 universities of applied sciences, sustained by private and state subsidy providers or public providers with state accreditation. The main task of universities of applied sciences (FH) is to provide hands-on education at higher education level, which equips students with skills in the fields of applied sciences at an acceptable academic level, to meet the necessary requirements of practical work, and to support both the freedom to choose one's own education path and the occupational flexibility of graduates;
d) university colleges of teacher education, sustained by the state or through private means with state accreditation;
e) universities of philosophy and theology, supported by the Catholic Church;
f) IST Austria, established in 2006, whose main task is the development of new fields of research and post-graduate education in the form of PhD programmes and postdoctoral programmes.

Currently (as of the winter semester 2012), roughly 300,000 students are enrolled in public universities (including DUK), around 41,000 students are enrolled in universities of applied sciences and around 7,300 students are enrolled in private universities.

3.1.1.2. Diversified HEIs offering diversified study programmes and degrees

In Austria, two parallel systems for regular degree programmes coexist: the "old" pre-Bologna system and the three-cycle system with Bachelor, Master and Doctoral programmes.
In the "old" system, HEIs (public and private universities, universities of applied sciences) offer *Diplom* programmes, an older long-cycle type of higher education qualification, usually granted from universities upon the completion of studies consisting of 240 to 360 ECTS credits or upon the completion of programmes offered by universities of applied sciences

comprising 240 to 300 ECTS credits. Diplom degrees guarantee admission to a doctoral programme.
Since the implementation of the Bologna Process in Austria, HEIs offer bachelor programmes consisting of 180 ECTS credits, master programmes consisting of 120 ECTS credits at universities or 60 to 120 ECTS credits at universities of applied sciences, and doctoral programmes (3-year programmes).
There are also Austrian-specific programmes: university courses (*Universitätslehrgang* offered by universities), further education courses (*Lehrgang zur Weiterbildung* offered by universities of applied sciences), and higher education programmes (*Hochschullehrgang* at university colleges of teacher education).

3.1.1.3. Quality assurance and the role of the AQ Austria

AQ Austria was founded in 2011 as part of the restructuring of the EQA system in Austria introduced by the adoption of the quality assurance framework law (*Qualitätssicherungsrahmengesetz*, QSRG) in July 2011. Until then, EQA was characterised by a sector-specific configuration, both institutionally and procedurally. The first organisation for EQA in Austria was established in 1993, namely, the Universities of Applied Sciences Council (FHR), as an independent agency in accordance with the Federal Act on University of Applied Sciences Degree Programmes (FHStG). Its most important tasks were the accreditation of degree programmes and the evaluation of institutions, the awarding of academic degrees and the recognition of foreign academic qualifications, the monitoring of degree programmes, advising the responsible federal ministries and the national parliament on questions relating to universities of applied sciences, the assessment and evaluation of statistical information regarding the universities of applied sciences sector. As a remark, FHR was a founding member of the ENQA.
In 1999, based on the Federal Act on the Accreditation of Education Institutions as Private Universities (University Accreditation Act – UniAkkG 1999), the Austrian Accreditation Council (ÖAR) was founded. The ÖAR was an independent agency responsible for the accreditation of private universities and their degree programmes, and the supervision of accredited private universities. Like FHR, ÖAR had also belonged to the ENQA since it was founded.
Public universities were required to establish management systems for quality and performance assurance according to the Federal Act on the Organisation of Universities and their Studies (Universities Act 2002 – UG). The same also applies to the DUK in accord with the Federal Act on the Danube University Krems (DUK Act 2004).
In 2004, the Austrian Quality Assurance Agency (AQA) was founded with the aim to conduct external evaluations. AQA was also a full member of the ENQA.
According to the new HS-QSG adopted in July 2011, EQA at HEIs involves programme and institutional accreditation, as well as audit processes.

Public universities must obtain certification of their internal quality management system through a quality audit process every seven years. The certification decisions are not linked to any direct legal or financial consequences. Universities can commission AQ Austria or any other internationally recognised organisation.
Private universities have to be accredited institutionally by AQ Austria every six years. New degree programmes created in the interim period must also undergo initial accreditation. However, there is no programme reaccreditation because programme reaccreditation is part of institutional reaccreditation.
Universities of applied sciences have to be accredited institutionally or have to get accreditation of their new programmes before institutional re-accreditation. The latter only occurs once and thereafter they enter in the audit system. However, the validity of their accreditation status depends on a positive certification result from the audit process.

3.1.2. The legal setup and tasks of the AQ Austria

AQ Austria, founded in 2011, is responsible for the assessment of the quality of the academic programs provided by almost all post-secondary HEIs in Austria (public universities, universities of applied sciences, private universities), with the exception of university colleges of teacher education, IST Austria and universities of philosophy and theology.
The Agency's remit comprises a vast array of legally regulated functions in the field of EQA, which encompasses the accreditation of HEIs and their programmes (private universities and universities of applied sciences), audits of internal quality management systems (public universities and universities of applied sciences), consultancy, studies and system wide analyses, as well as carrying out audits for non-Austrian HEIs. However, the registration of programmes offered by non-local providers is not a function of AQ Austria, but of the ministry.
Apart from AQ Austria, there are further actors involved in the field of quality assurance: the Quality Assurance Council for Teacher Education, established in 2013, is responsible for quality assurance at university colleges of teacher education and teacher education programmes, and the Office of the Ombudsman, established in 2012, is responsible for handling student complaints. There are no mandatory EQA processes for the IST Austria or universities of philosophy and theology.
The AQ Austria has an international profile and is active in continuing the international activities of its predecessor organisations, especially in Germany and the Balkans. As the successor of ÖAR and FHR, AQ Austria is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and other international networks. Its area of operations encompasses Austria and other European countries.

Organisational Structure
The organisational structure of the AQ Austria, legally determined by the HS-QSG, is based upon the principle of bringing independent expertise and stakeholder participation, together with a strong international component.
The General Meeting represents the relevant interest groups. It appoints ten of the fourteen members of the Board, and elects the five members of the Governing Committee. At least 45% of the members of all Agency bodies must be women.

The Board
The Board is the central independent decision-making body of the AQ Austria. This committee of experts is responsible, in particular, for all decisions regarding accreditation and certification, procedural guidelines and standards, supervision responsibilities in relation to accredited educational institutions in Austria, the publication of the results of quality assurance processes, and the organisation of the Agency. Because there are various types of quality assurance processes, the Board possesses both regulatory and non-regulatory competencies.
The Board is made up of fourteen members, of which:

- eight have to be experts in the field of higher education with academic qualification and experience in the field of quality assurance. The members must represent different sectors of higher education. At least half of them must be foreign members.
- two should be student representatives, one of whom must be foreign.
- and finally, four members come from professional practical fields with expertise in national and international higher education, experience in university-related occupational areas and the ability to judge matters of quality assurance.

Their term of office lasts five years with the possibility of one reappointment. The members of the Board elect a President and a Vice-President for a term of five years. The President chairs the Board and the Agency, and also represents the Agency in public.
The Board must meet non-publically at least twice a year, although, in reality, it meets about seven times a year. Decision-making requires the presence of at least ten members, and at least eight members have to vote in favour of a proposal in order for it to be approved. The voting weight of all the members is equal.

The Governing Committee
The Governing Committee is a strategic advisory body. It consists of five members who are elected from the General Meeting. The public university sector, the private university sector, the sector of the universities of applied sciences, students and professional fields are each represented by one representative. The members serve a five-year term with reappointments allowed. The Committee exercises its advisory function

through communicating informed views, especially with regard to the procedural guidelines and standards of the Agency, financial planning, progress reporting, job applications and the rules of operation. The structure ensures that stakeholders are systematically integrated into the continued development of quality assurance processes. In contrast to the Board, the members here function as representatives of the organisations from which they are sent. The Governing Committee meets at least twice a year.

The General Meeting

The General Meeting, which meets at least twice a year, represents the essential interest groups, which include:

- the Advisory Council for Economic and Social Affairs (six representatives),
- the Austrian National Union of Students (two representatives),
- the Association for the Establishment and Promotion of National Student Representation of Private Universities (one representative),
- the Universities Austria (six representatives),
- the Association of Austrian Universities of Applied Sciences (four representatives),
- the Austrian Private Universities' Conference (two representatives),
- the Federal Ministry of Science and Research (two representatives).

The representatives are appointed by the federal minister on the recommendation of their respective organisations for a period of five years with reappointments allowed. The General Meeting elects a chairperson directly from the group.

The specific duties of the General Meeting are the election of the Governing Committee, the nomination and appointment of the Appeals Committee, and the nomination of the members of the Board, who need to be accepted by way of a two-thirds majority vote. All the other decisions are made by a simple majority vote, assuming that at least fifteen members are present. SER-Annex 4 lists the current membership of the General Meeting.

The Appeals Committee

The Appeals Committee is responsible for dealing with appeals by HEIs contesting the accreditation process and certification decisions. It consists of two Austrian and two foreign members coming from HEIs with expertise in the field of quality assurance and with legal qualifications, as well as, in cases of conflicts of interest, one Austrian and one foreign substitute member. They are appointed for a period of three years by the General Meeting with the possibility of reappointment. The members are not allowed to belong to any other body of the Agency, and must operate without instruction. The Committee makes decisions based on a simple majority vote.

The Secretariat
The Secretariat of AQ Austria is managed by a managing director, who handles the day-to-day business operations of the Agency. Based on the broad legal mandate of the Agency, the Secretariat is subdivided into four departments (Accreditation, Audit/Consulting, Analysis and Reporting, Administration), each of which is managed by a department manager. There are additional two units (Legal Affairs and International Relations). 26 people (22,4 FTE) are employed at present.

3.2. Background to the review process

The evaluation process started in 2013 when AQ Austria asked for an external review for the purpose of assessing the AQ Austria's compliance with the ESG, as the core requirement for membership of the ENQA, which was commissioned to conduct the procedure.

In April 2013, the Board appointed a 4-member team responsible for the preparation of the SER (working group for SER, SEG). This SEG was supplemented by a working group within the Secretariat (3 members). The first draft of the SER was discussed in October 2013 with some of the key stakeholders (Universities Austria, UNIKO; Association of Austrian Universities of Applied Sciences, FHK; Austrian Private Universities' Conference, ÖPUK; Austrian National Union of Students, ÖH; Federal Ministry of Science and Research, BMWF). The SER was adopted at the Board meeting on 27 November 2013 taking also the opinions of the Governing Committee into consideration.

In parallel, pursuant to its mandate, ENQA worked on a proposal for the composition of the Panel and, in agreement with the responsible Austrian bodies, the following five persons were appointed:

- **Rafael van Grieken**, Full professor of Chemical Engineering and Director of the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain (ANECA), Spain – Chair

- **Karmela Barišić**, Full professor of Biochemistry, Dean of the Faculty of Pharmacy and Biochemistry of the University of Zagreb, President of the Accreditation Council of the Agency for Science and Higher Education, Croatia – Secretary

- **Nicolaas Pronk**, Policy Advisor, Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO), The Netherlands

- **Andrejs Rauhvargers**, Secretary General, Latvian Rectors' Council, Latvia – *EUA nomination*

- **Henni Saarela**, International and Student Societies Specialist at the Student Union of the University of Oulu, Finland – *ESU nomination*

The SER was delivered to the members of the Panel in a timely manner in December 2013 in the form of an electronic document. Most of the key documents were available in English.

3.3. Context of the review

The review concerns the renewal of AQ Austria's membership to ENQA, dating from 23 April 2012.

3.4. Report structure

The report contains eight sections.

Section 1 is the executive summary.

A list of acronyms is given in Section 2.

Section 3 brings a brief description of the Austrian HE system, AQ Austria and the context of the evaluation.

Section 4 presents the assessment of the Panel regarding AQ Austria's compliance with the ESG related to EQA.

The Panel's conclusion and additional reflections are given in Sections 5 and 6.

The report includes three annexes: terms of reference, site visit programme, and the List of documents used in the review of the AQ Austria.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. COMPLIANCE WITH EUROPEAN STANDARDS

In terms of ENQA *Guidelines for External Reviews of Quality Assurance Agencies in the European Higher Education Area*, the compliance of AQ Austria with the *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* is considered in relation to Part 3 of the *European Standards and Guidelines: European standards and guidelines for external quality assurance agencies*. Each criterion consists of the corresponding ESG standard quoted, the evidence and opinions used and their appraisal, and a concluding assessment by the Panel concerning the level of compliance (fully compliant, substantially compliant, partly compliant or not compliant).

4.1.1. ENQA criterion 1 – Activities (ESG 3.1, 3.3)

Standard:

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institution or programme level) on a regular basis. The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the ESG. The external quality assurance activities may involve evaluation, review, audit, assessment, accreditation, or other similar activities and should be part of the core functions of the member.

Guidelines:

The standards for external quality assurance contained in Part 2 provide a valuable basis for the external quality assessment process. The standards reflect best practices and experiences gained through the development of external quality assurance in Europe since the early 1990s. It is therefore important that these standards are integrated into the processes applied by external quality assurance agencies towards the higher education institutions. The standards for external quality assurance should together with the standards for external quality assurance agencies constitute the basis for professional and credible external quality assurance of higher education institutions.

Assessment against ENQA Membership Criterion 1:

The Panel concluded that AQ Austria is in substantial compliance with the ENQA membership criterion 1. The details are below.

a) ENQA Criterion 1/ESG 3.1 Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education

Standard:
The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

ESG Part 2: Standards and guidelines for external quality assurance of higher education

ESG 2.1 Use of internal quality assurance procedures

***Standard*:**
The external quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines.

Guidelines:
The standards for internal quality assurance contained in Part 1 provide a valuable basis for the external quality assessment process. It is important that the institutions' own internal policies and processes are carefully evaluated in the course of external processes, to determine the extent to which the standards are being met. If higher education institutions are to be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own internal quality assurance processes, and if those processes properly assure quality and standards, then external processes might be less intensive than otherwise.

AQ Austria Compliance

AQ Austria is, according to the SER and Mission statement (SER-Appendix 4.1.), committed to enhancing the quality development of HEIs. Because the effectiveness of internal quality assurance (IQA) of a HEI plays an important role in the quality enhancement of the respective institution, AQ Austria demonstrated that it always takes IQA into consideration in all its external evaluation processes (audits, institutional and programme accreditations, programme and system accreditations at German HEIs). Documents concerning different external assessment procedures (i.e., Guidelines for the Audit of HEIs – Quality Management System, Appendix 5.1; Decree on Accreditation of Private Universities, Appendix 5.2; Decree on Accreditation of Universities of Applied Sciences, Appendix 5.3; Guideline: International Accreditation of Bachelor, Master and PhD programmes, Appendix 5.6; *Leitfaden: Programmakreditierung*, Appendix 5.7; and *Leitfaden: Systemakreditierung*, Appendix 5.8.) clearly stress that EQA processes take into account IQA and criteria in Part 1 of the ESG.
Although the different evaluation processes that are applied to different HEIs rely on the IQA management of the institution and the weight of its

contribution varied from audit (based mainly in the assessment of the IQA system) to accreditation processes (where it is one of the issues to be assessed), it is not clear whether the effectiveness of the IQA system is reflected on the intensity or differences in the different evaluation processes. It seems that the criteria for the application of different evaluation processes are more related to the type of HEI than to the degree of development of the IQA system achieved (audits to public universities, accreditations to private and universities of applied sciences).

Panel Judgement

Assessment against ESG Standard 2.1: The Panel finds that AQ Austria substantially complies with this standard.

ESG 2.2 Development of external quality assurance processes

***Standard*:**
The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.

Guidelines:
In order to ensure clarity of purpose and transparency of processes, quality assurance methods should be designed and developed through a process involving key stakeholders, including higher education institutions. The processes that are finally agreed should be published and should contain explicit statements of the aims and objectives of the processes as well as a description of the processes to be used.
As external quality assurance makes demands on the institutions involved, a preliminary impact assessment should be undertaken to ensure that the processes to be adopted are appropriate and do not interfere more than necessary with the normal work of higher education institutions.

AQ Austria Compliance

The establishment of AQ Austria and the adoption of the new law on the quality development of new quality assurance processes (audits, institutional accreditations, programme accreditations) was result of intensive consultations between all interest groups and AQ Austria.
Apart from AQ Austria, there are other actors involved in the field of quality assurance: Quality Assurance Council for Teacher Education, responsible for quality assurance at university colleges of teacher education and teacher education programmes (founded in 2013), and the Office of the Ombudsman, responsible for handling student complaints (established in 2012). There are no mandatory EQA processes for the IST Austria and universities of philosophy and theology.

AQ Austria stated in the SER that, concerning the participation of interest groups in shaping policy, the Agency is able to confirm that the composition of the Board provides a solid foundation allowing for a broad array of national and international perspectives. The fact alone that the Board membership comprises a variety of experts, who offer experience in and views on quality in higher education from the context of their own specific backgrounds, makes possible for the Agency to get the multidimensional perspective needed to develop the right quality policy in different HEIs. The inclusion of very diverse and informed experts in their personal capacity and not as representatives of the 'official' positions of any interest groups proved to be an advantageous move in the start-up stage of AQ Austria. This has laid the foundation for further policy development work of the Agency.
New regulations were approved by the Board in June 2013 after long consultations with stakeholders (the timeline of the development of the process is presented in the SER).

The Panel discussed the merger process and the development of the new regulations during the site visit extensively with different interview groups, and concluded that there is a shared vision (strong commitment) amongst the various stakeholders (representing the education sector, society, the economic/industrial sector, the labour market) with regard to the urgency of the merger of the three former Austrian agencies.
It was evident that the merging process, introduced by the Federal Ministry, satisfied all the three university sectors: public universities, universities of applied sciences and private universities. Public universities in Austria have a long history, while the other two university sectors are younger but growing fast. A fragmented system comprising three agencies, like the one prior to the merger, was unsuitable for the further development of EQA, and the contribution to the enhancement of the HEIs. After the merger process, the EQA system in Austria has been more harmonised and the mutual understanding between the three university sectors has improved. HEIs emphasised the benefits of having a single agency as a partner in the development of quality assurance. On the other hand, AQ Austria pointed out the importance of needing to take a close look at the entire higher education sector.
A remarkable feature is the perception of AQ Austria from the HE system not only as a regulatory body but also as a supporting agency for the development of QA processes in the different institutions. This double role is a key element in promoting quality culture in the Austrian HE system, making QA policy to be in the core of the strategic development of the institutions.
The Panel was impressed by the positive acceptance of the merger process and new regulations by universities of applied sciences and private universities. However, the public university sector was rather sustained. The Panel also observed that a detailed analysis of the impact of the merger process on the development of quality assurance in Austria has not yet been made.

Panel Judgement

Assessment against ESG Standard 2.2: The Panel affirms that AQ Austria is fully compliant with this standard.

ESG 2.3 Criteria for decisions

***Standard*:**
Any formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently.

Guidelines:
Formal decisions made by quality assurance agencies have a significant impact on the institutions and programmes that are judged. In the interests of equity and reliability, decisions should be based on published criteria and interpreted in consistent manner. Conclusions should be based on recorded evidence and agencies should have in place ways of moderating conclusions, if necessary.

AQ Austria Compliance

AQ Austria carries out quality assurance processes by engaging independent external experts in accordance with predefined and publically known assessment criteria. Several documents (regulations, guidelines, manuals), enacted by the Board of AQ Austria, contain the assessment criteria for the quality assurance processes that AQ Austria conducts. They are:

- Decree on Accreditation of Universities of Applied Sciences (decided at the 14th meeting of the Board on 14 June 2013),
- Decree on Accreditation of Private Universities (decided at the 14th meeting of the Board on 14 June 2013),
- Guideline for the Audit of Higher Education Institutions' Quality Management Systems (decided at the 14th meeting of the Board on 14 June 2013),
- Guidelines for International Accreditation of Bachelor, Master and PhD Programmes (decided at the 15th meeting of the Board on 11 July 2013),
- Guidelines for System Accreditation Processes and Guidelines for Programme Accreditations in Germany according to the rules of the Accreditation Council (decided at the 16th meeting of the Board on 3 September 2013).

All the rules, regulations and guidelines of AQ Austria are published on the Agency's website.
Concerning audit processes, the Board takes the final decision on certification based on the final version of the evaluation report and on a HEI's comment on its contents. Certification can be granted subject to conditions, and their fulfilment documented within a period of two years.

Certification is denied if at least one standard is assessed as "not met". In such cases, HEIs are re-audited two years later. Certification subject to conditions following a re-audit is not possible.
Institutional or programme accreditations are completed with the final decision of the Board on accreditation (accreditation without conditions, accreditation denied, accreditation with conditions, accreditation suspended for a period of 12-24 months; these last two decisions are related to the accreditation procedures outside Austria).
The Panel was particularly interested in the consistency of the application of the criteria. In order to ensure the consistent application of the assessment criteria, AQ Austria pays particular attention to adequately preparing its panel experts. Moreover, the Secretariat plays an important role in the preparation and during site visits, in drafting the experts' reports and in the preparation of the Board decision. In particular, the coordinators overseeing processes have the task of making sure the assessments are complete and of ensuring that the criteria are being applied properly. Concerning this, they intervene in assessments in a moderating role and support the chairperson of the expert team without taking any decisions themselves in the process. Coordinators also undergo extensive, internal training, in which the development of a common understanding of the regulations is particularly encouraged. The Board plays a leading role to provide for consistent decision-making practice. It can thereby partly tie in with the decision-making practice of the former institutions. To support a consistent decision-making practice, the Agency is currently working on the creation of an internal database of precedents. Regardless of these measures, AQ Austria views sharing common interpretations and these interpretations being properly communicated to HEIs and interest groups as a constant challenge for all persons involved (panel experts, employees, members of the Board).

The Panel also focused on the consequences of failed quality assurance processes and whether these affect student rights. The Panel was told that failed accreditation/audit processes could have consequences for the performance agreement of such HEIs with the Federal Ministry. It was clearly stated that student rights are not affected, that they can complete their studies, that the degrees achieved by already enrolled students are recognised, but that no new students can be enrolled.

Panel Judgement

Assessment against ESG Standard 2.3: The Panel finds that AQ Austria fully complies with this standard.

ESG 2.4 Processes fit for purpose

***Standard*:**
All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.

Guidelines:
Quality assurance agencies within the EHEA undertake different external processes for different purposes and in different ways. It is of the first importance that agencies should operate procedures which are fit for their own defined and published purposes.

Experience has shown, however, that there are some widely-used elements of external review processes which not only help to ensure their validity, reliability and usefulness, but also provide a basis for the European dimension to quality assurance.

Amongst these elements the following are particularly noteworthy:

- *insistence that the experts undertaking the external quality assurance activity have appropriate skills and are competent to perform their task;*
- *the exercise of care in the selection of experts;*
- *the provision of appropriate briefing or training for experts;*
- *the use of international experts; participation of students;*
- *ensuring that the review procedures used are sufficient to provide adequate evidence to support the findings and conclusions reached;*
- *the use of the self-evaluation/site visit/draft report/published report/follow-up model of review;*
- *recognition of the importance of institutional improvement and enhancement policies as a fundamental element in the assurance of quality.*

AQ Austria Compliance

While the processes conducted by AQ Austria use the conventional procedural steps in the EHEA (self-evaluation, peer-review, site-visit, report writing, report publication and follow-up), the EQA processes are designed differently and individually depending on their objectives (for example, audits differ from accreditations, or institutional accreditations differ from programme accreditations; all the accreditation criteria are designed in such a way as to make yes/no decisions possible, and audit standards are designed in a development-oriented approach; while audits include two site visits, accreditations include only one; etc.).
In the SER, AQ Austria states that the configuration of its quality assurance processes is appropriately designed to reach immediate objectives.
A big challenge for AQ Austria in the near future will be the implementation of audit processes in the university of applied sciences sector, which enters into the audit scheme after a single successful institutional reaccreditation. The validity of the accreditation status is

linked to the positive result of audits (as it is stipulated in the law), in contrast to audits of public universities for which a negative result has an undefined consequence, implying that a greater level of compliance-oriented behaviour by universities of applied sciences is likely to occur in audits, which means that the original objective of audits has been changed and this issue deserves critical re-thinking.
Deviations from standard assessment procedures in requests for amendments of accreditation decisions were mentioned in the SER and were also discussed by the Panel during the site visit. The Panel was given the following explanation: in individual cases, the Board decides which procedural steps to take in order to be able to carry out the process appropriately and efficiently in view of specific objectives. Experts are appointed and carry out site visits only when an expert vote on an amendment is deemed necessary. If, for example, a given change is not of great significance or has no apparent effect on quality aspects (e.g., an increase in the student number capacity by only a few more students), the Board decides without engaging experts. In any case, the criteria for "non-standard" assessment procedure in requests for amendments of accreditation decisions were not very clearly stated and this question should be developed more transparent in the upcoming future.
AQ Austria pointed out in the SER that a legal limitation to procedures lies in the impossibility to condition initial accreditations regardless of whether they are institutional or programme accreditations. The same view is shared by AQ Austria's stakeholders.
Another important issue related to Standard 2.4 is the selection of experts. The selection process is based on the competencies of experts appropriate for a specific review process. Although in this stage they have not developed yet a pool of experts because of the training costs, AQ Austria is taken advantage on the expert pool already available from the former agencies (AQ Austria has a database of experts with about 400 people listed). Student expert candidates come from this pool of experts available from the former agencies or they could be proposed by the Austrian National Union of Students (ÖH), the European Students' Union (ESU) or German or Swiss student bodies. The ÖH organises regular trainings for pool members and its pool members are ready and willing for more intensive engagement in expert teams in the upcoming future.
AQ Austria recruits professional practitioners through appropriate professional associations and alumni organisations.
Expert panels (5 members) are internationally comprised, and AQ Austria ensures that the recruited international experts have sufficient knowledge of the Austrian higher education system and its different branches through training (usually consists of an informative teleconference) taking place prior to site visits. Some concern was raised that the level of international experts' knowledge of the Austrian context is not always as good as can be desired.
AQ Austria views the work of experts as the core component of every quality assurance process. Accordingly, the training of experts is of utmost importance. For the purpose of preparing experts, AQ Austria organises

general workshops on the role of experts, and procedural regulations and criteria, provides extensive information about the institution undergoing a review process, provides the necessary documentation at least one month prior to the preparatory meeting and site visit, produces a draft of the timeline for site visits, organises a preparatory meeting either several weeks prior to site visits or immediately preceding visits, and provides a template to all experts aiming to ensure that all parts of the assessment are properly dealt with. AQ Austria concludes agreements with its experts in which their duties are regulated.

Panel Judgement

Assessment against ESG Standard 2.4: The Panel finds that AQ Austria is substantially compliant with this standard.

ESG 2.5 Reporting

***Standard*:**
Reports should be published and should be written in a style which is clear and readily accessible to its intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find.

Guidelines:
In order to ensure maximum benefit from external quality assurance processes, it is important that reports should meet the identified needs of the intended readership.
Reports are sometimes intended for different readership groups and this will require careful attention to structure, content, style and tone.
In general, reports should be structured to cover description, analysis (including relevant evidence), conclusions, commendations, and recommendations. There should be sufficient preliminary explanation to enable a lay reader to understand the purposes of the review, its form, and the criteria used in making decisions.
Key findings, conclusions and recommendations should be easily locatable by readers.
Reports should be published in a readily accessible form and there should be opportunities for readers and users of the reports (both within the relevant institution and outside it) to comment on their usefulness.

AQ Austria Compliance

AQ Austria is obliged to publish reports on quality assurance processes. According to the HS-QSG, the results of audits and accreditation processes must be published by both AQ Austria and the applicant institution. AQ Austria is to publish the results of a review process, including the report of the panel of experts, the response of the HEI, the decision taken by the Board and a summary of the main results of the report.
The same rules apply to all quality assurance processes conducted by AQ Austria (institutional and programme accreditations, audits, system and

programme accreditations in Germany, international accreditations of Bachelor, Master and PhD programmes).
The Agency encourages experts to write the reports themselves and, in order to prevent inconsistency between reports, it provides panel experts with a template thus ensuring that each expert report contains information about the review process, basic information about the HEI, the findings and assessments, recommendations where appropriate, and examination of all the relevant criteria. The coordinator of the panel is responsible for the summary of the main results of the review process.

The Panel asked relevant interview groups about previous reports because no full report was available on the Agency's website. An issue that was brought up was that the previous reports from the former agencies were not published in their entirety but in an abbreviated form, which was not helpful to stakeholders and the public. The Panel was told that this is a new publication policy and not yet in full practice in Austria given that the former quality assurance agencies did not publish the findings of review processes and that, therefore, no full reports were available.
Although in the future AQ Austria will publish full reports on QA assessments of HEIs and they will be available, right now there are only reports published in an abbreviated form.
If any progress report or follow-up of the Agency would be taken, in the next review this point should be clearly checked.

Panel Judgement

Assessment against ESG Standard 2.5: The Panel affirms that AQ Austria is substantially compliant with this standard.

ESG 2.6 Follow-up procedures

***Standard*:**
Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently.

Guidelines:
Quality assurance is not principally about individual external scrutiny events: It should be about continuously trying to do a better job. External quality assurance does not end with the publication of the report and should include a structured follow-up process to ensure that recommendations are dealt with appropriately and any required action plans drawn up and implemented. This may involve further meetings with institutional or programme representatives. The objective is to ensure that areas identified for improvement are dealt with speedily and that further enhancement is encouraged.

AQ Austria Compliance

AQ Austria designs all follow-up processes individually. In the case of accreditations subject to conditions, the university must submit a development plan and must be able to show within nine months that the conditions have been fulfilled. If in the course of an audit process shortcomings in quality management are determined, meaning that the HEI is granted conditional certification, such original shortcomings will be reappraised by AQ Austria within a period of two years following initial certification.
In addition, universities of applied sciences and private universities are obliged to submit an annual report on major developments to the Agency. These reports provide important information to the Agency on the implementation of requirements or recommendations and are, at the same time, the Agency's tool for monitoring the development of a HEI between two accreditation/audit cycles. The above annual reports are also a source of system-wide analyses. However, public universities submit annual reports directly to the Federal Ministry, and may bear influence on the institution's performance contract and funding.
Follow-up procedures are also implemented in international quality assurance processes carried out by AQ Austria (i.e., international accreditation processes of Bachelor, Master and PhD programmes, and system and programme accreditation processes in Germany).
During the site visit, the Panel discussed extensively the importance of having the option of initial accreditation subject to conditions. The Panel supports the initiative of AQ Austria – in function of quality improvement - for changing legislation with the purpose of introducing initial accreditation subject to conditions.

Panel Judgement

Assessment against ESG Standard 2.6: The Panel finds that AQ Austria substantially complies with this standard.

ESG 2.7 Periodic reviews

***Standard*:**
External quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclic basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance.

Guidelines:
Quality assurance is not a static but a dynamic process. It should be continuous and not "once in a lifetime". It does not end with the first review or with the completion of the formal follow-up process. It has to be periodically renewed. Subsequent external reviews should take into account progress that has been

made since the previous event. The process to be used in all external reviews should be clearly defined by the external quality assurance agency and its demands on institutions should not be greater than are necessary for the achievement of its objectives.

AQ Austria Compliance

EQA processes are undertaken on a cyclic basis, as mentioned in the SER:

- audits at public universities and universities of applied sciences every seven years,
- institutional accreditations of universities of applied sciences are given for a period of six years and reaccreditations for a period of additional six years,
- programme accreditations of the study programmes of universities of applied sciences are performed only once, with the validity period of programme accreditations bound to institutional accreditation,
- institutional accreditations of private universities are granted for a period of six years, reaccreditations for a period of additional six years, and subsequent reaccreditations for a period of up to twelve years,
- programme accreditations are generally tied to the institutional accreditation of private universities, whereby initial accreditations take place at the level of programme accreditations.

The validity period of international quality assurance processes carried out by AQ Austria either depend on the national regulation of the country in which processes are being undertaken or on Austria's national regulation for accreditation processes conducted in Austria:

- system accreditations in Germany are awarded for a period of six years, whereby a so-called interim evaluation must be undertaken after the first half of the accreditation period has expired. System reaccreditations are awarded for a period of additional eight years,
- programme accreditations in Germany are awarded for a period of five years, and reaccreditations for a period of additional seven years,
- international accreditations for Bachelor, Master and PhD programmes are awarded for a period of six years.

The Panel concluded that period review and cycle length regulations, as well as the review processes to be used are all clearly defined. However, there is no evidence of periodic reviews considering that AQ Austria was established in 2011 and no periodic review has yet been done. If any progress report or follow-up of the Agency would be taken, in the next review this point should be clearly checked.

Panel Judgement

Assessment against ESG Standard 2.7: The Panel concludes that AQ Austria is substantially compliant with this standard.

ESG 2.8 System-wide analyses

***Standard*:**
Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments etc.

Guidelines:
All external quality assurance agencies collect a wealth of information about individual programmes and/or institutions and this provides material for structured analyses across whole higher education systems. Such analyses can provide very useful information about developments, trends, emerging good practice and areas of persistent difficulty or weakness and can become useful tools for policy development and quality enhancement. Agencies should consider including a research and development function within their activities, to help them extract maximum benefit from their work.

AQ Austria Compliance

The SER states that AQ Austria has the statutory mandate to conduct studies and system analyses on thematic priorities and crosscutting issues. The Agency's tasks of conducting analyses and writing reports are prescribed by law. Accordingly, a separate department responsible for the above two tasks has been established.
Every three years, the Agency prepares and publishes a report on the development of quality assurance in Austrian HEIs.
The report is based on the annual reports of universities of applied sciences, private universities and public universities. AQ Austria considers this report to be a great opportunity for providing guidance to HEIs in terms of the continued development of IQA. Therefore, the report is given high priority and includes external consultation with international experts.

The Panel considers the efforts made by AQ Austria to fulfil its duties prescribed by law and the fact that a separate department within the Secretariat was, in turn, established to be positive. At present, AQ Austria is working on its first report on the development of quality assurance in Austria.
In any case, right now the Panel found that there was no report on thematic priorities or crosscutting issues, and therefore there was no evidence to support the compliance of such criteria. If any progress report or follow-up of the Agency would be taken, in the next review this point should be clearly checked.

Panel Judgement

Assessment against ESG Standard 2.8: The Panel affirms that AQ Austria is partially compliant with this standard.

Assessment against ENQA Membership Criterion 1/ESG Part 2: The Panel affirms that AQ Austria complies with this criterion substantially.

b) ENQA Membership Criterion 1/ESG 3.3 Activities

Standard:
Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis.

Guidelines:
These may involve evaluation, review, audit, assessment, accreditation or other similar activities and should be part of the core functions of the agency.

AQ Austria Compliance

AQ Austria is responsible for the EQA of almost all HEIs (public universities, universities of applied sciences and private universities, with the exception of teacher training colleges, the IST Austria and universities of philosophy and theology) in Austria and has a wide range of legally regulated tasks in the field of EQA:

1. development and implementation of EQA processes, at the minimum audits and accreditation processes, in accordance with national and international standards;
2. accreditations of HEIs and programmes (i.e., universities of applied sciences and their study programmes, and private universities and their programmes);
3. reports to the national parliament by way of the responsible Federal Minister;
4. continuous supervision of accredited HEIs and their programmes regarding accreditation requirements;
5. performing tasks in accordance with the provisions of the University of Applied Sciences Studies Act (FHStG) and the Private University Act (PUG);
6. certifications of HEIs (i.e., public universities and universities of applied sciences) based on audits;
7. conducting studies and system analyses, evaluations and projects;
8. providing information and advice on issues of quality assurance and quality development;
9. international cooperation in the field of quality assurance.

In terms of EQA, the Agency is obligated to carry out state accreditations of universities and their programmes (private universities, universities of applied sciences), certifications of universities' internal quality management systems (public universities, universities of applied sciences), provide consultancy, conduct studies and system analyses, and it is allowed to perform quality assurance processes at non-Austrian universities.
Since its foundation in 2011, AQ Austria has started 26 accreditation processes in the universities of applied sciences sector, 13 accreditation processes in the private university sector, 16 accreditation processes abroad and one system accreditation. At the time of the completion of the SER and during the site visit, most of processes were still ongoing.
The panel enquired whether the effects of the diversified tasks of AQ Austria on IQA processes of the Agency are positive or negative. It was observed that AQ Austria views the diversity of tasks as a positive challenge and source of motivation.

Panel Judgement

Assessment against ENQA Membership Criterion 1 (ESG 3.3): The Panel concluded that AQ Austria is substantially compliant with this standard.

4.1.2. ENQA criterion 2 – Official status (ESG 3.2)

***Standard**:*
Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European higher education area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.

AQ Austria Compliance

AQ Austria is a legal entity under public law. Its bodies, organisation and responsibilities are legally prescribed by the HS-QSG. The Agency is responsible for the EQA of almost all HEIs (public universities, universities of applied sciences and private universities, with the exception of teacher training colleges, the IST Austria and universities of philosophy and theology) in Austria. Cross-border studies are not the responsibility of AQ Austria, but of the Ministry.
During the site visit, the Panel confirmed that AQ Austria is recognised and appreciated by all stakeholders, who expressed their trust in the Agency's work and further development.
The management of the Agency highlighted the specific status of AQ Austria in relation to audit processes given that public universities and universities of applied sciences can choose internationally recognised

agencies instead of AQ Austria. However, as far as accreditation processes are concerned, private universities and universities of applied sciences are bound to AQ Austria.
In addition to its legal basis in Austria, AQ Austria has also been officially recognised by the German Accreditation Council and the Ministry of Education of Kazakhstan as an accreditation agency operating in Kazakhstan. Operating abroad is not an issue of financial gain, but of international orientation and recognition. The international activities and recognition of AQ Austria in Germany by the German Accreditation Council are highly regarded by the Agency's social partners.
The Panel recognises the alignment of the national legislation to the recommendations of the Bucharest Communique allowing EQAR-registered agencies to perform their activities in Austria, although the limitation to audit processes is not very well understood. Similarly, the Panel did not understand the need of the existence of the Quality Assurance Council for Teacher Education, responsible for quality assurance at university colleges of teacher education and teacher education programmes, as an independent body/agency.

Panel Judgement

Assessment against ENQA Membership Criterion 2: AQ Austria is fully compliant with this criterion.

4.1.3. ENQA criterion 3 – Resources (ESG 3.4)

Standard:
Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes, procedures and staff.

AQ Austria Compliance

AQ Austria has approximately 700 m^2 of office space equipped with modern office infrastructure. The majority of employees have individual offices. The Agency has a security-protected data network. The premises include a library and a conference room for meetings, workshops and training courses. 26 employees (22.4 full-time equivalents) are employed at present.
The central data storage system gradually developed into a document management system. This document platform supports both the Secretariat and the Agency's bodies.
The financing of AQ Austria is regulated by law. It is funded by annually allocated federal funds. The Agency charges a fee for the quality assurance processes it conducts and this charge includes the cost of the evaluation and a flat process fee. AQ Austria makes autonomous decisions

about its funds and spending them. For the financial year 2014, 2.17 million euros are required to cover the Agency's activities, including staff training.
The majority of the Secretariat's staff has a lot of experience in quality assurance in higher education given that the secretariats of the three predecessor organisations were merged. Employees' knowledge and skills are further developed through participation in conferences, being continuously involved in the production of relevant literature and policy-related work, and closely cooperating and communicating with the members of the Board.
Staff meetings, departmental and cross-departmental, take place regularly, and strategy workshops, together with the presidency are organised twice a year. New employees undergo an introductory training programme.

Panel Judgement

Assessment against ENQA Membership Criterion 3: AQ Austria is fully compliant with this criterion.

4.1.4. ENQA criterion 4 - Mission statement (ESG 3.5)

Standard:
Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.

Guidelines:
These statements should describe the goals and objectives of agencies' quality assurance processes, the division of labour with relevant stakeholders in higher education, especially the higher education institutions, and the cultural and historical context of their work. The statements should make clear that the external quality assurance process is a major activity of the agency and that there exists a systematic approach to achieving its goals and objectives. There should also be documentation to demonstrate how the statements are translated into a clear policy and management plan.

AQ Austria Compliance

Contributing to the development of quality assurance in Austrian higher education is the main task of AQ Austria, according to the SER and Mission statement. Accordingly, the Agency sees itself as a centre of expertise and a provider of advice for matters of quality assurance. Relative to the tasks and role, AQ Austria adheres to the following principles, as mentioned in the SER:

- Universities have the primary responsibility for quality assurance and quality enhancement in their performance areas;

- AQ Austria views its processes as an adjunct to IQA of universities and aligns them with the self-defined quality goals of universities. AQ Austria is independent from instruction in its activities. Decisions in quality assurance processes are made solely on aspects of quality;
- The implementation of quality assurance processes is based on international standards of good practice in general and the ESG in particular;
- The basis for the development of processes and standards or criteria is collaboration with universities and other stakeholders.

The Agency ensures and documents the conformity of internal quality management systems of Austrian HEIs to national and international standards. Accordingly, the promotion and enhancement of quality in higher education are the core elements of review processes.
AQ Austria pays particular attention to its international activities believing that quality assurance processes should be internationally recognised and that exchanges of international expertise should be allowed for. The Agency has proceeded with the international engagement of its predecessor organisations having gained experience in cooperation with many countries and regions, particularly with German-speaking countries, and Central and Eastern Europe. Its international activities are grounded on its international strategy, a remarkable feature for the agency which is used also to gain confidence in the national market where other international agencies could compete for audit processes.
The Panel affirms that the Agency's mission statement is implemented in its activities, although a strategic plan and a risk management plan have not been defined at this stage for medium-term development.

Panel Judgement

Assessment against ENQA Membership Criterion 4: AQ Austria is substantially compliant with this criterion.

4.1.5. ENQA criterion 5 - Independence (ESG 3.6)

Standard:
Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that the conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.

Guidelines:
An agency will need to demonstrate its independence through measures, such as:
• Its operational independence from higher education institutions and governments is guaranteed in official documentation (e.g. instruments of governance or legislative acts).

• The definition and operation of its procedures and methods, the nomination and appointment of external experts and the determination of the outcomes of its quality assurance processes are undertaken autonomously and independently from governments, higher education institutions, and organs of political influence.
• While relevant stakeholders in higher education, particularly students/learners, are consulted in the course of quality assurance processes, the final outcomes of the quality assurance processes remain the responsibility of the agency.

AQ Austria Compliance

The independence of AQ Austria is legally warranted. The purpose of the Agency and its bodies is designed to balance and combine the principles of independence and participation of relevant stakeholders in the higher education sector.
The Board is the central decision-making body that includes experts from the field of higher education, students and working professionals. Considering that all relevant decisions are made on the basis of existing expertise, stakeholders in the strict sense are excluded from decision-making. The processes of nomination and appointment also secure the independence of the Board. The General Meeting and Governing Committee as bodies of stakeholders are not involved in accreditation and audit decisions in any way. They have no influence over decision-making. On the other hand, stakeholder participation in the General Meeting provides them with the opportunity to be involved in the further development of the Agency and its review processes.
The selection of experts is another important level which grants the independence of AQ Austria and its review processes. It involves several steps checking for potential conflicts of interest and incompatibilities.
The statutory provision that accreditation decisions must be formally approved by the responsible Minister was discussed in detail during the site visit. The Panel was told that the Minister is neither able to change a given accreditation decision nor refer a decision back to the Agency for review. The Minister can only deny approval of an accreditation, but no Minister has exercised such discretion since the establishment of the accreditation system in 1993. The Panel found no reason, either in the SER or in evidence obtained during the site visit, to challenge this view.

Panel Judgement

Assessment against ENQA Membership Criterion 5: AQ Austria fully complies with this criterion

4.1.6. ENQA criterion 6 - External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the members (ESG 3.7)

***Standard**:*

The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available.
These processes will normally be expected to include:
• a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process;
• an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency;
• publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes;
• a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.

Guidelines:

Agencies may develop and use other processes and procedures for particular purposes. Agencies should pay careful attention to their declared principles at all times, and ensure both that their requirements and processes are managed professionally and that their conclusions and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even though the decisions are formed by groups of different people. Agencies that make formal quality assurance decisions or conclusions which have formal consequences should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of each agency.

AQ Austria Compliance

Relevant steering documents demonstrate clearly the commitment of AQ Austria to the principles and methods of this ESG:

- All methods, processes, criteria and standards of quality assurance processes must be approved by the Board;
- A public review process is a prerequisite for the adoption of a regulation;
- Regulations, directives and guidelines are published on the Agency's website;
- The peer principle is prescribed by law;
- Quality assurance processes are conducted by independent external experts;
- The results of audit and accreditation processes are published by both the Agency and the HEI being audited or undergoing an accreditation process;
- The law regulates the possible range of decisions relating to audits and accreditations;
- HEIs can appeal against review processes and audit or accreditation decisions. Appeals are handled by the Agency's Appeals Committee. The appeal procedure is well-defined (e.g., in the SER, pp. 44-45).

Panel Judgement

Assessment against ENQA Membership Criterion 6: AQ Austria is fully compliant with this criterion.

4.1.7. ENQA criterion 7 - Accountability procedures (ESG 3.8)

Standard:
Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.

Guidelines:
These procedures are expected to include the following:
1. A published policy for the assurance of the quality of the agency itself, made available on its website;
2. Documentation which demonstrates that:
• the agency's processes and results reflect its mission and goals of quality assurance;
• the agency has in place, and enforces, a no-conflict-of-interest mechanism in the work of its external experts;
• the agency has reliable mechanisms that ensure the quality of any activities and material produced by subcontractors, if some or all of the elements in its quality assurance procedure are subcontracted to other parties;
• the agency has in place internal quality assurance procedures which include an internal feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from its own staff and council/board); an internal reflection mechanism (i.e. means to react to internal and external recommendations for improvement); and an external feedback mechanism (i.e. means to collect feedback from experts and reviewed institutions for future development) in order to inform and underpin its own development and improvement.
3. A mandatory cyclical external review of the agency's activities at least once every five years which includes a report on its conformity with the membership criteria of ENQA.

AQ Austria Compliance

AQ Austria is subject to the following accountability procedure at national level:

- The Agency is required to provide financial reports for the Ministry of Finance;
- The Agency's annual activity report and an auditor's report are to be submitted to the national parliament via the Federal Ministry and published;
- Every three years, the Agency is to publish a report on the development of quality assurance at Austrian HEIs;
- The Agency is required to report to the Minister with regard to its compliance with laws and regulations, and the performance of its duties;
- The Agency is subject to review by the Austrian Court of Audit and the Office of the Ombudsman.

The Agency is also subject to accountability procedures at international level:

- the German Accreditation Council with respect to accreditation processes carried out in Germany, and
- ENQA.

The Agency uses the feedback mechanisms (feedbacks on rules, criteria for decisions and review processes) of the three predecessor institutions. The Panel was informed that the new IQA system for review processes was only adopted in autumn 2013, and that therefore results are not yet available. The Panel was not able to corroborate the implementation of the IQA system and its inherent processesIf any progress report or follow-up of the Agency would be taken, in the next review this point should be clearly checked.

Panel Judgement

Assessment against ENQA Membership Criterion 7: AQ Austria is substantially compliant with this criterion.

4.1.8. ENQA criterion 8 - Consistency of judgements, appeals system and contribution to ENQA aims

***Standard**:*
i. The agency pays careful attention to its declared principles at all times, and ensures both that its requirements and processes are managed professionally and that its judgments and decisions are reached in a consistent manner, even if the judgments are formed by different groups ii. If the agency makes formal quality assurance decisions, or conclusions which have formal consequences, it should have an appeals procedure. The nature and form of the appeals procedure should be determined in the light of the constitution of the agency.
iii. The agency is willing to contribute actively to the aims of ENQA.

AQ Austria Compliance

The consistency of judgements is discussed under ESG 2.3.

The Appeals Committee has had to handle only one case so far. During the site visit, the Panel was given additional information on appeals. Specifically, following an appeal procedure outcome, a Higher Administrative Court is accessible.

The willingness to contribute to ENQA's aims
AQ Austria has proceeded with the activities of its three predecessor institutions, all of which were full members of ENQA. AQ Austria is represented at ENQA by its director and the Agency has actively participated in the following ENQA working groups: Staff Development,

Impact of QA, Quality Assurance in Lifelong Learning, and Stakeholder Involvement in QA Practises.

Panel Judgement

Assessment against ENQA Membership Criterion 8: AQ Austria is fully compliant with this criterion.

5. CONCLUSION

In the light of the self-evaluation report, the documented and oral evidence considered, the Panel concluded that the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria complies with the ENQA membership criteria as follows:

- ENQA criterion 1
  a) ENQA criterion 1 / ESG Part 2: Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education **substantial compliance**
  - sub-criterion
    Use of internal quality assurance procedures (ESG 2.1) *substantial compliance*
    Development of external quality assurance processes (ESG 2.2) *full compliance*
    Criteria for decisions (ESG 2.3) *full compliance*
    Processes fit for purpose (ESG 2.4) *substantial compliance*
    Reporting (ESG 2.5) *substantial compliance*
    Follow-up procedures (ESG 2.6) *substantial compliance*
    Periodic reviews (ESG 2.7) *substantial compliance*
    System-wide analyses (ESG 2.8) *partial compliance*

  b) ENQA criterion 1 / (ESG 3.1., 3.3) Activities **substantial compliance**
- ENQA criterion 2 (ESG 3.2) Official status **full compliance**
- ENQA criterion 3 (ESG 3.4) Resources **full compliance**
- ENQA criterion 4 (ESG 3.5) Mission statement **substantial compliance**
- ENQA criterion 5 (ESG 3.6) Independence **full compliance**
- ENQA criterion 6 (ESG 3.7) External quality assurance criteria and processes used by agencies **full compliance**
- ENQA criterion 7 (ESG 3.8) Accountability procedures **substantial compliance**
- ENQA criterion 8 Consistency of judgements, appeals system and contribution to ENQA aims **full compliance**

AQ Austria is, in the opinion of the Panel, sufficiently compliant to have its full membership of ENQA confirmed for an additional period of five years.

The Panel congratulates the determination of AQ Austria to contribute in the development of higher education institutions through the enhancement of the quality of their provisions.

6. GENERAL REFLECTIONS ON AQ AUSTRIA AND BEYOND

It is evident, both from the SER and this report, that AQ Austria is committed to the continuous improvement of its own processes and operates in a manner consistent with good international and European practice, including the *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, and has made progress in refining its operations since its establishment in 2011.
It is important to state that the SER provides realistic information through self-reflection. The SER demonstrated clear awareness of the majority of possible weaknesses in the implementation of AQ Austria processes, as well as awareness of new challenges for AQ Austria due to changes in the EHEA.
In conclusion to this report, the Panel would like to add its analysis of strengths, weaknesses, constraints and challenges:

- Strengths
  - Expertise (both national and international) in the field of quality assurance
  - Promoting and establishing a quality culture
  - Regional and international orientation (European perspective)
  - Ability to work within a complex legislative framework
  - Strong management/steering leadership

- Weaknesses
  - Heavy workload in some departments
  - Medium/Long-term planning (financially and strategic)

- External constraints
  - The balance between the intensity of the accountability process derived from EQA and the improvement achieved in the HEIs as degree award providers
  - There are still higher education sectors/institutions in Austria outside the domain of AQ Austria

- Challenges
  - Competition with foreign quality assurance agencies
  - A fast implementation of the IQA system of the agency

After considering the analysis of AQ Austria and the legal framework in which the agency has to develop its activities, the Panel wants to raise the following recommendations:

- Modify properly the intensity of the evaluation process depending on the effectiveness of the IQA system applied, independently from the type of HEI;
- Design a transparent criteria for amendments of accreditation procedures, depending on the type of amendment requested, since it is not perfectly understood by the HEIs;
- The implication of negative results in the audit process for public universities should be made more transparent;
- Increase the availability of information about the assessment reports for all stakeholders;
- Establish an adequate follow-up procedure for audit in public universities;
- System-wide analysis should be performed and results should be published;
- Medium-term goals have to be included in a strategic plan, as well as a risk management plan;
- Although an IQA system of AQ Austria is being developed right now, it is important to speed up the process of its implementation;
- It is desirable that AQ Austria develops its training opportunities for evaluators and continues to collaborate with ÖH in providing student evaluators and stakeholder consultancy. We recommend that joint trainings for all evaluators, including students, are considered.
- Due to the participation of international experts, careful preparation (training) is needed to understand properly the Austrian Higher Education system.

Although it is not in the authority of decision by AQ Austria, there are some other issues that restrict the development of QA in the Austrian Higher Education System:

- Impossibility of conditional initial programme accreditation;
- The link between audit and accreditation for universities of applied sciences and its consequences;
- The incomplete integration of the higher education system under the same quality assurance policy performed by AQ Austria (university colleges of teacher education, philosophy and theology universities, IST Austria, cross-border studies under current legislation);
- The possibility to have common quality assurance assessment regulations for all the HEIs, independently of their types (public, private or applied sciences universities).

7. ANNEXES

7.1. Terms of references

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

Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE
September 2013

1. Background and Context

The Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria) was established as part of a fundamental reorganisation of the system of external quality assurance in Austria. The legal basis for establishing AQ Austria is the Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (Hochschul-Qualitätssicherungsgesetz) which entered into force on 1 March 2012.
According to AQ Austria's legal remit, AQ Austria is responsible for the entire higher education sector in Austria (except university colleges of teacher education).

In carrying out its responsibilities, AQ Austria follows these three basic principles:

- The higher education institutions bear the main responsibility for the quality of studies and for quality assurance.
- AQ Austria is an independent institution, with regard both to the Federal Ministry of Science and Research as well as to the higher education institutions.
- AQ Austria applies international standards of quality assurance within the Austrian higher education system.

AQ Austria includes the competences and activities of the three existing organisations, namely the Österreichischer Akkreditierungsrat (Austrian Accreditation Council – ÖAR) the Fachhochschulrat (FH Council - FHR) and the Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance (AQA). According to the law, AQ Austria is the legal successor of ÖAR and FHR. The Full membership of ÖAR and FHR was transferred to AQ Austria on 12 April 2012.

The ENQA policy on amalgamation of agencies requires that the newly established agency undergoes an external ENQA coordinated review within two years of the amalgamation being completed, i.e. within April 2014.

2. Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

This is a type A review, as defined in the *Guidelines for external reviews of quality assurance agencies in the European Higher Education Area.* It will evaluate the way in which and to what extent AQ Austria fulfils the criteria for the ENQA membership and thus the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*. Consequently, the review will also provide information to the ENQA Board to aid its consideration of whether AQ Austria should be reconfirmed Full Membership of ENQA. The review panel is not expected, however, to make any judgements as regards the reconfirmation of Full Membership.

3. The Review Process

The process is designed in the light of the *Guidelines for external reviews of quality assurance agencies in the European Higher Education Area*.

The evaluation procedure consists of the following steps:

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

3.1 Nomination and appointment of the review team members

The review panel consists of five members: four external reviewers (one or two quality assurance experts, representative(s) of higher education institutions, student member) and a review secretary. Three of the reviewers (including the review secretary) are nominated by the ENQA Board on the basis of proposals submitted to ENQA by the national agencies, and are drawn from senior serving members of Board/Council or staff of ENQA member agencies. The fourth external reviewer is drawn from a nomination provided by the European University Association (EUA). The nomination of the student member is asked from the European Students' Union (ESU). One of the panel members serves as the chair of the review.

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

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

3.2 Self-evaluation by AQ Austria, including the preparation of a self-evaluation report

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

- Self-evaluation is organised as a project with a clearly defined schedule and includes all relevant internal and external stakeholders;
- The self-evaluation report is broken down by the topics of the evaluation: background description of the current situation of the Agency; analysis and appraisal of the current situation; proposals for improvement and measures already planned; a summary of perceived strengths and weaknesses (SWOT analysis);
- The report is well-structured, concise and comprehensively prepared. It clearly demonstrates the extent to which AQ Austria fulfils its tasks of external quality assurance and meets the criteria for the ENQA membership and thus the ESG. The report is submitted to the review panel a minimum of eight weeks prior to the site visit.

3.3 A Site Visit by the Review Panel

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

The review panel will be assisted by AQ Austria in arriving in Vienna, Austria.

The site visit will close with an oral presentation and discussion of the major issues of the evaluation between the review panel and AQ Austria.

3.4 Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report

On the basis of the review panel's findings, the review secretary will draft the report in consultation with the review panel. The report will take into account the purpose and scope of the evaluation as defined under article 2. It will also provide a clear rationale for its findings with regards to each ENQA membership criteria. A draft will be submitted for comment to AQ Austria within two months of the site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If AQ Austria chooses to provide a statement in reference to the draft report it will be submitted to the chair of the review panel within two weeks after the receipt of the draft report. Thereafter the review panel will take into account the statement by AQ Austria, finalise the document and submit it to AQ Austria and ENQA.

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

4. Follow-up Process and Publication of the Report

AQ Austria will consider the expert panel's report and inform ENQA of its plans to implement any recommendations contained in the report. The review report will be published on the AQ Austria website. The report will also be published on the ENQA website, regardless of the review outcome and decision by the Board.

5. Budget

AQ Austria shall pay the following review related fees:

Fee of the Chair	4,750 EUR
Fee of the Secretary	4,750 EUR
Fee of the 3 other panel members	8,250 EUR (2,750 EUR each)
Administrative overhead for ENQA Secretariat	5,000 EUR
Experts Training fund	1,250 EUR
Travel and subsistence expenses (approximate)	6,000 EUR

This gives a total indicative cost of 30,000 EUR for a review team of 5 members. In the case that the allowance for travel and subsistence expenses is exceeded, AQ Austria will cover any additional costs after the completion of the review. However, the ENQA Secretariat will endeavour to keep the travel

and subsistence expenses in the limits of the planned budget, and will refund the difference to AQ Austria if the travel and subsistence expenses go under budget.

In the event of a second site visit required by the Board and aiming at completing the assessment of compliance, and should the agency accept a second visit, an additional fee of 500 EUR per expert, as well as travel and subsistence costs are recoverable from the agency.

6. Use of the report

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

The review report is to be used by the Board of ENQA for the purpose of reaching a conclusion on whether AQ Austria has or has not met the membership criteria/ESG.

The working paper authored by the Panel is to be considered as a report owned by ENQA only after being approved by the ENQA Board.
Once submitted to AQ Austria and ENQA and until the decision by the Board is made, the working paper may not be used or relied upon by AQ Austria, the panel and any third party and may not be disclosed without the prior written consent of ENQA. AQ Austria may use the report at its discretion only after the Board decision has been made.

AQ Austria shall be aware that, should an application to the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) be submitted, the Chair of the panel might be approached by the Register Committee for any request for clarification. The Chair of the panel may give a response but he/she is requested to copy the Director of ENQA on all correspondence.

7. Indicative Schedule of the Review

The duration of the evaluation is scheduled to take about 9 months, from October 2013 to June 2014:

Agreement on terms of reference and protocol for review	October 2013
Appointment of review panel members	Oct-Nov 2013
Self-evaluation completed	December 2013
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	December 2013
Briefing of review panel members	January 2014
Review panel site visit	February 2014
Draft of evaluation report to AQ Austria	April 2014
Statement of AQ Austria to review panel if necessary	April 2014
Submission of final report to ENQA	May 2014
Consideration of the report by ENQA and response of AQ Austria	June 2014
Publication of report	June 2014

7.2. Site visit programme

[Monday 3rd March]		
16:45	Dr. Hopbach will pick the review panel up at the foyer of Hotel Tigra	
17:00 - 19:00	Private meeting of the review panel (conference room of AQ Austria)	Review panel only
19.30	*Dinner at Gastwirtschaft Stopfer*	Review panel only

[Tuesday 4th March]		
08:30 - 09:15	***Meeting with the Presidency of AQ Austria***	*Univ. Prof. Dr. Anke **Hanft** (President)* *Univ. Prof. Dr. Wolfgang **Mazal** (Vice-President)*
09.15 – 10.00	***Meeting with the Board***	*Univ. Prof. Dr. Ada **Pellert*** *Dr. Ferry **Stocker*** *Univ. Prof. Dr. Hans **Weder*** *Mag. Thomas **Mayr***
10.00 – 10.45	***Meeting with the working group for self-evaluation***	*Dr. Achim **Hopbach*** *Christina **Rozsnyai**, M.A., M.L.S.* *Julian **Hiller*** *Mag. Daniela **Wanek***
10:45 - 11:00	Coffee break with internal review panel discussion	Review panel only
11.00 – 12:00	***Meeting with the representatives of the public universities***	*Mag. Elisabeth **Fiorioli** (Uniko)* *Rektor Univ. Prof. Dr. Wolfgang **Schütz** (Medical University of Vienna)* *Dr. Katharina **Stowasser-Bloch** (Medical University of Vienna)* *Rektorin Univ. Prof. DI Dr. Sabine **Seidler** (Vienna University of Technology)*

[Tuesday 4th March]		
12:00 – 13:00	***Meeting with the representatives of private universities and the universities of the applied sciences***	*Univ. Prof. Dr. Dr h.c. mult. Alfred* ***Pritz*** *(Sigmund Freud Private University Vienna)* *Univ. Prof. Dr. Kerstin* ***Fink*** *(Fachhochschule Salzburg University of Applied Sciences)* *Univ. Prof. DI Dr. Karl-Peter* ***Pfeiffer*** *(Fachhochschule Joanneum University of Applied Sciences)* *Prof. Dr. med. Wolfgang* ***Huhn*** *(Fachhochschule Kiel University of Applied Sciences)* *Prof. Dr. Karl* ***Wöber*** *(Modul University Vienna Privatuniversität)* *Mag. Heidi* ***Esca-Scheuringer*** *(FHK)*
13:00 – 14:00	Internal review panel discussion with lunch	Review panel only
14.00 – 15.00	***Meeting with the student's union of Austria***	*Valerie* ***Semorad*** *Mag. Janine* ***Wulz*** *Daniel* ***Kroiss****, BSc*
15.00-16.30	***Meeting with evaluators (including students)***	Rektorin Prof. Anne **Lequy** (Hochschule Magdeburg-Stendal) (Skype) *Prof. i.R. Dr. Stephan* ***Laske*** *(University of Innsbruck)* *Mario* ***Drobics*** *(AIT – Austrian Institute of Technology)* *Marko* ***Mayr*** *(Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst)*
16:30 - 17:00	***Meeting with the Appeals Committee***	*Univ. Prof. Dr. Jana* ***Geršlová***

[Tuesday 4th March]		
17.00 – 17:30	Coffee break with internal review panel discussion	Review panel only
17:30 - 19:00	***Meeting with the General meeting, the Governing Committee and the Federal Ministry of Science and Research***	*Dr. Karin **Riegler** (Chair of the General meeting)* *Dr. Andreas **Neuhold** (Federal Ministry of Science and Research)* *Dr. Hannes **Diem** (Federal Ministry of Science and Research)*
19.00 – 19:30	Review panel meeting to summarize outcomes of day one	*Review panel only*
20.00	Dinner at Restaurant Ella's	*Review panel only*

[Wednesday 5th March]		
09:00 – 09.45	***Meeting with the Managing Director and Deputy Director***	*Dr. Achim **Hopbach** (Managing Director)* *Mag. Anita **Kruisz** (Deputy Managing Director)*
09.45 – 10.00	Coffee break with internal review panel discussion	Review panel only
10.00 – 10.30	***Meeting with the Department for Accreditation***	*Mag. Elvira **Mutschmann-Sanchez** (Head of Department)* *Mag. Michael **Ofner*** *Mag. Harriet **Leischko***
10.30 – 11.00	***Meeting with the Department for Quality Audit/Consulting***	*Mag. Dietlinde **Kastelliz** (Head of Department)* *M.A., Dr. Annina **Müller-Strassnig***
11.00 – 11.30	***Meeting with the Department for Analysis and Reports***	*Dr. Achim **Hopbach** (Managing Director and Head of Department)* *Mag. Barbara **Birke***

[Wednesday 5th March]		
11.30 – 12.00	***Meeting with Administration, Legal affairs and International relations***	*Mag. Anita* ***Kruisz*** *Mag. Elvira* ***Mutschmann-Sanchez***
12:00 - 14:45	Final discussion of review panel to agree outcomes and to discuss main lines of the report with lunch	*Review panel only*
14:45 - 15:00	***Final meeting with the Presidency of AQ Austria***	*Univ. Prof. Dr. Anke* ***Hanft*** *(President)* *Univ. Prof. Dr. Wolfgang* ***Mazal*** *(Vice-President)* *Dr. Achim* ***Hopbach***
15:00	Departure	

7.3. List of documents used in the review of AQ Austria

A. Documents requested and received by the Panel before the visit

1. AQ Austria self evaluation report
2. Appendix_ENQA review
3. Erratum
4. Annual report 2012 (English and German versions)
5. Workplan 2014-2015 (English and German versions)

B. Documents requested and received (√) by the Panel during the visit

1. An analysis of the compliance of the Part 1 ESG through the AUDIT program of AQ Austria

√ 2. Acts, records about the workshops, seminars or presentations of the programs developed by AQ Austria

√ 3. Example of the summary of one report published by the agency

√ 4. Provide examples demonstrating the focus on consistency of decisions in the agency

5. Examples of Progress Reports about implementation of recommendations after follow-up procedure

- ✓ 6. Reports containing system-wide analysis
- 7. Statistics about how many AUDIT certificates have been granted from the applications, and how many have been issued with conditions
- ✓ 8. Statistics about the number of accredited programs and institutions from applications in the last years
- ✓ 9. Records on the regular staff meetings, the voluntary Jour fixe strategy workshops, or the strategy workshops organized with the presidency
- ✓ 10. The training/introduction program for new staff
- ✓ 11. The financial plan for 2014-15
- ✓ 12. The strategic plan for AQ Austria (workplan 2014/2015)
- ✓ 13. Annual report of the Ombudsman Student
- ✓ 14. The report on the development of QA at the Austrian HEIs
- ✓ 15. The procedures or records coming from the IQA system of AQ Austria
- 16. Records on staff appraisal session led by the director
- ✓ 17. Records on workshops or seminars for prospective experts
- ✓ 18. Some feedback questionnaires from universities about the review processes carried out by AQ Austria
- 19. Records on the analysis performed by the coordinators about the feedback and reports
- ✓ 20. Records on team meetings after the review process
- ✓ 21. Records on the workshops organized with stakeholders
- 22. Quality reports provided every two years provided by AQ Austria

C. Documents provided by ENQA

1. ENQA Code of conduct for review expert
2. Panel members' CVs
3. Terms of Reference for the review of AQ Austria
4. AQA's policy of internal quality management, Progress report as at October 2010
5. Austrian Accreditation Council, Implementation of Recommendations of External Review 2007 (as of January 2010)
6. FHR Progress Report, February 2010