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# ENQA AGENCY REVIEW: CYPRUS AGENCY OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION (CYQAA)

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report analyses the extent to which the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education (CYQAA) complies with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education (ESG). It is based on an ENQA-coordinated external review conducted as part of CYQAA's application for ENQA membership and entry into the European Quality Assurance Register. The review was carried out between February 2018 and February 2019, with a site visit to Nicosia, Cyprus, between 2 and 4 October 2018. The report does not address an audit, one of CYQAA's seven external quality assurance activities covered by the Terms of Reference for the review, as it was not yet a clearly defined process based on an approved methodology at the time of the panel's site visit. The process will be fully in place at the beginning of 2019 when the ENQA Board considers CYQAA's application.

The higher education system in Cyprus has been gradually built in the last three decades. Until 2015, there were no external quality assurance mechanisms for public higher education institutions, and those for private institutions involved three bodies advising the national authorities. The legislation enacted in 2015 established CYQAA as the only national quality assurance body, funded from the State budget, and a uniform quality assurance framework for all institutions. CYQAA's activities include: institutional, departmental, and programme evaluations / accreditation reviews; evaluations / accreditation reviews of joint programmes and of cross-border education provided by local institutions in other countries; assessment of conditions for the provision of cross-border education by foreign institutions in Cyprus; and audits. All processes are mandatory, and accreditation is required for institutions, departments, and programmes to operate. The first accreditation cycle is ongoing; no departmental evaluation, evaluation of cross-border education provided by local institutions or audit was conducted until the time of the panel's site visit. CYQAA has been an ENQA affiliate since 2016.

CYQAA has a clear legal basis for its external quality assurance activities, conducts them on a regular basis and has sufficient resources to do so. All main stakeholders have a role to play in its core activities and / or governance. On the one hand, the legislation explicitly guarantees the agency's independence; on the other hand, it provides for a major role of the national authorities in the appointment of its governing body and ties CYQAA to the Ministry of Education and Culture in terms of organisational arrangements. However, this does not limit its independence in practice and safeguarding mechanisms are in place. In more general terms, CYQAA's autonomy in designing its external quality assurance methodologies is limited by the legislation insofar as it predetermines various arrangements (down to the composition of external expert panels), usually left to the discretion of an agency.

CYQAA's overall aim of supporting quality improvement is not yet carried forward effectively or directly through its evaluation processes which focus on controlling institutions. However, considering the early stage of development of quality assurance and how much needs to be done to provide basic conditions for quality education, the current control-oriented phase is laying the groundwork for both CYQAA and institutions to move on to a quality-improvement phase in the future. Moreover, the agency has sought to help institutions to adopt best international practices through published materials and seminars; such activities aimed at quality enhancement are also scheduled for the coming years. However, no material that could be considered a thematic analysis has been produced. A more detailed plan for at least two years, covered by the recently approved budget, is needed to guide activities towards the strategic aims. Despite its young age, the agency has already established some formal and effective internal quality assurance mechanisms; there is, though, too much reliance on informal communication, in particular, as a way of collecting feedback after each evaluation. The agency is perceived as responsive, reliable and trustworthy, and as ensuring equal treatment of all institutions, which is much appreciated by the stakeholders.

Within the limits set by the legislation, which prescribes to a large extent not only how CYQAA should conduct its external evaluations but also how institutions should shape their internal quality assurance mechanisms, the academic community is genuinely involved in designing the agency's processes. Its evaluation standards address to a large extent Part 1 of the ESG; its evaluations / accreditation reviews follow the ESG-recommended stages and are conducted consistently, except that there needs to be a more consistent focus on aspects specific to joint programmes. However, as noted above, the processes, including the follow-up phase, focus much more on control or compliance-assurance than on quality improvement; more consideration is given to whether the mechanisms required by law are in place than to the effectiveness of internal quality assurance. This is understandable in the newly established quality assurance system, and does not make the processes unfit for purpose – in line with the legislation, they should actually aim at both ensuring compliance with the requirements and supporting quality improvement, and there is also some early evidence of improvements triggered by CYQAA's evaluations. The selection arrangements in place and the guidelines and briefing for experts are, overall, adequate for the agency to appoint competent expert panels for external evaluations, and extensive involvement of international experts is particularly commendable. For the sake of transparency, information on the selection process should be published; and more in-depth training is necessary for students-experts to maximise their involvement and contribution.

There are clear and published criteria for decisions taken in external evaluations, and evidence that CYQAA's governing body is consistent in its decision-making, but additional guidelines are needed for experts to ensure full consistency in scoring compliance with the standards. There is much room for improvement in reporting – the quality of external evaluation reports varies in terms of evidence provided to substantiate scores and consistency between comments and scores; all reports, including those leading to refusal of accreditation, should be published on the CYQAA website. Institutions have all the information they need to appeal against CYQAA's decisions; the appeals procedure is clearly defined but not yet fully transparent; the agency has already addressed this by drafting amendments to the legislation. Institutions can make complaints through various formal and informal channels, but the practices would need to be integrated into a clearly defined procedure.

The panel finds the agency to be fully compliant with ESG 3.2, 3.5, 3.7 and 2.2; substantially compliant with ESG 3.1, 3.3, 3.6, 2.1, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5 and 2.7; partially compliant with ESG 2.6; and non-compliant with ESG 3.4. The Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews state that the overall judgement on compliance does not result from a mathematical calculation, but a case of non-compliance would normally lead to a judgement that the agency is not substantially compliant with the ESG overall. The panel has taken into account that ESG 3.4 (Thematic analysis) is exceptional in that, unlike the other ESG, it refers to the research function of an agency rather than its core external quality assurance activities. Non-compliance with this ESG has no bearing on how CYQAA operates as an institution and conducts its core activities or on the extent to which CYQAA complies with the other ESG. Thus, the panel has concluded that CYQAA's activities are, overall, in substantial compliance with the ESG.

# INTRODUCTION

This report analyses the compliance of the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education (CYQAA) (Φορέας Διασφάλισης και Πιστοποίησης της Ποιότητας της Ανώτερης Εκπαίδευσης) with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG). It is based on an external review conducted between February 2018 and February 2019.

## BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW AND OUTLINE OF THE REVIEW PROCESS

### BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW

ENQA's regulations require all member agencies to undergo an external cyclical review, at least once every five years, in order to verify that they act in substantial compliance with the ESG as adopted at the Yerevan ministerial conference of the Bologna Process in 2015.

Established in 2015, CYQAA has been an ENQA affiliate since April 2016. It is now applying for ENQA membership and for entry onto the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). This external review was conducted to evaluate the way in which and the extent to which CYQAA's activities comply with the ESG. It aimed to provide information to the ENQA Board to aid its consideration of whether membership should be granted to CYQAA, and to EQAR to support the agency's application to the register.

The Terms of Reference (ToRs) for the review identified the following activities of CYQAA to be addressed:

1. Institutional evaluation – accreditation
2. Departmental evaluation – accreditation
3. Programme evaluation – accreditation
4. Joint programme evaluation – accreditation
5. Evaluation – accreditation of cross-border education provided by local institutions in other countries
6. Assessment of conditions for the provision of cross-border education by foreign institutions in Cyprus
7. Audit

In accordance with the ToRs, the review should also address CYQAA processes for the recognition of accreditation activities of other quality assurance agencies and, in particular, how CYQAA ensures ESG compliance in cases where the agencies are not registered in EQAR.

As this was CYQAA's first external review, the panel was expected to pay particular attention to the policies, procedures, and criteria in place, being aware that full evidence of concrete results in all areas might not be available at this stage.

The panel has collected and analysed evidence for all seven activities of CYQAA listed above. However, it is not in a position to assess ESG compliance of audits. No audit was conducted by the time of the review, and at the time of the visit it was not yet a well-defined process based on a clear and approved methodology. The legislation provides the basis for audits as it refers to General Internal Evaluation Reports (GIERs) which should be submitted by higher education institutions (HEIs) to the agency every three years and follow the structure and address indicators defined by it. CYQAA's GIER template addresses: strategic planning; programmes (public information; programme review; student assessment; international dimension; student placements; links with societal needs; graduate tracking); teaching (number and workload of staff; student evaluation of teaching; teaching and learning methods, facilities; mobility; link between teaching and research); research (policy, funding, incentives; research output; infrastructure; student involvement; collaboration with external institutions, and contribution to local and national development); and administrative services and infrastructure (services for staff and students;

use of resources and facilities). As stated in the legislation, failure to submit a GIER is a 'negative criterion' in institutional evaluations. First GIERs should be submitted in November 2018.

All the evidence for audits collected (SAR; CYQAA's written clarifications provided before the visit; meetings with CYQAA staff; and the final clarification meeting with CYQAA Council members) indicates that an audit will be both a process in its own right and a way of cross-checking its findings with those from the other processes. In general terms, audits are intended to provide 'an overall image of quality' of HEIs. It is also clear to the panel that they will be conducted by CYQAA itself, with no involvement of external experts, and feedback on findings will be given to HEIs in the form of a report to be published. However, the scope of the process was yet to be precisely defined. The panel understands from the evidence collected that it was not yet decided at the time of the visit whether 'audit' would refer to the entire process of analysing GIERs, following up on findings through site visits in problematic cases (e.g. significant discrepancies between GIERs and programme evaluation reports) and producing a report, or only to audits / inspections undertaken in problematic cases. The methodology or procedure for audits was not yet formally in place at the time of the visit. The two alternative approaches presented during the visit involve an analysis of GIERs by a staff committee for the CYQAA Council to take a decision or an analysis of GIERs by the CYQAA Council members themselves. CYQAA intends to analyse GIER contents against the aspects defined in the template and check them for ESG compliance. Guidelines on how to assess contents and ESG compliance were yet to be developed. For the panel's comments on the possible methodology for audits, see the 'Additional observations' section.

As the panel should assess what is in place, it was unable to make a judgment on audits, in particular, with regard to ESG 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 and 2.5, and audits are not addressed in the ESG sections of the review report. CYQAA intends to start analysing GIERs from HEIs soon after they are submitted in November 2018. Thus, since an audit will be fully in place by the time when the ENQA Board considers the review report in early 2019, CYQAA could be requested by the ENQA Board to submit an update document on the audit process. See also the 'Additional observations' section.

## REVIEW PROCESS

The 2018 external review of CYQAA was conducted in line with the process described in the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and in accordance with the timeline set out in the Terms of Reference. The panel for the external review was appointed by ENQA and composed of the following members:

- **Bernard Coulie** (Chair, EUA nominee), Full Professor and Honorary Rector, Université catholique de Louvain (UCLouvain), Belgium;
- **Ewa Kolanowska** (Secretary, ENQA nominee), freelance higher education consultant, Poland;
- **Sandra Marcos Ortega** (Member, ENQA nominee), Head of International Affairs and Internal Quality, Quality Assurance Agency for the University System in Castilla y León (ACSUCYL); Associate professor at Open University of Cataluña (UOC), Spain;
- **Arus Harutyunyan** (Student member, ESU nominee), Master's degree student (Project Management), Armenian State University of Economics, Armenia.

CYQAA submitted its SAR in July 2018. At the panel's request, it also provided written clarifications relating to the national quality assurance (QA) context and the agency's QA processes (answers to two sets of questions, hereafter jointly referred to as the Addendum to the SAR) and additional documents (budget; CVs of its staff; annual activity reports and evaluation reports; aspects to be addressed by audits). The panel used the documents to identify the lines of enquiry for its site visit to CYQAA. The ENQA review coordinator arranged an online briefing for the panel to discuss the review process. The panel conducted the visit to validate the self-assessment and clarify points at issue. It produced a draft review report based on the documentary evidence and findings from the site visit. All decisions of the panel were taken by consensus. The draft report was sent to the ENQA coordinator for pre-screening

and to CYQAA for a factual accuracy check. The final report was submitted to ENQA. The panel confirms that it had access to all documents and stakeholders it wished to consult throughout the review. Administrative support was provided by the ENQA coordinator and the CYQAA liaison person.

### **Self-assessment report**

CYQAA set up a working group composed of staff to coordinate the self-assessment process, collect and analyse evidence and draft the SAR. A subcommittee of the CYQAA Council (the governing body) provided guidance, inputs and feedback. The process involved an analysis of documents, feedback collected from stakeholders since the agency's establishment, and results of a survey conducted among HEIs in March 2018. The survey addressed the level of their satisfaction with CYQAA's processes and their involvement in QA, and their trust in the QA system and in the agency performing its functions. The latter was particularly relevant as the current system had only recently been put in place (see below). Findings from the self-analysis were discussed in regular meetings and used to improve activities for fuller compliance with the ESG. The final SAR was approved by the CYQAA Council.

The SAR covered all aspects as recommended in the Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews, including the national higher education and QA context; CYQAA's activities and methodologies; its compliance with each of the ESG; and a SWOT analysis. Some key documents underpinning the agency's activities (national legislation, application templates, guidelines for experts, no-conflict-of-interest declaration, feedback questionnaires, and examples of analyses) were attached as annexes. Overall, the SAR provided a useful insight into CYQAA's legislative framework, aims and main activities. However, it did not give the panel a clear preliminary picture of CYQAA's methodologies for all its QA processes (e.g. no detail about the follow-up procedure for evaluations, methodology for audits or types of decisions taken and reports produced upon completion of the assessment of conditions for the provision of cross-border education by foreign HEIs and audits). A number of self-critical comments in the SAR showed that the self-assessment had helped CYQAA to identify some areas for further improvement. The SAR could have given, though, more consideration to the analysis of procedures as these are the central aspect of first agency reviews.

### **Site visit**

The site visit programme (see Annex 1) was prepared jointly by the CYQAA liaison person and the panel; some CYQAA Council and staff members were invited to attend more than one meeting, but this was unavoidable in a small agency like CYQAA. The panel had an on-site meeting with the CYQAA resource person to discuss the national context and an internal meeting to fine-tune the lines of enquiry. The visit to the agency, Nicosia, Cyprus, took place between 2 and 4 October 2018. The panel held interviews with all key stakeholders, including CYQAA's governing body, its team responsible for the SAR, staff and experts, and representatives of the evaluated HEIs, HEI QA officers, the national authorities and local stakeholders. The visit, including a Skype meeting with international experts, was very well organised. The panel also appreciated the willingness of the stakeholders to engage in discussions and explain the agency's QA processes against the specific national context. At the end of the visit, the panel met to agree conclusions from the review and briefed CYQAA on the main findings.

## **HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM IN THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS**

### **HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM**

The higher education system in Cyprus is relatively young, with first non-university HEIs established in the 1960s, the first public university in the early 1990s and the first private universities in 2007. Currently, the Government is committed to expanding and developing higher education as part of its

policy for Cyprus to become a regional education and research centre. In the recent years, despite the economic crisis, measures have been taken to widen access and promote international cooperation.

As a member of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), Cyprus has put in place key elements and tools of the Bologna Process: a three-cycle degree structure; a framework for the recognition of qualifications; a QA system; a National Qualifications Framework (NQF); the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS); and a Diploma Supplement. The following higher education qualifications are awarded: Certificate (1 year, 60 ECTS); Diploma (2 years, 120 ECTS); Higher diploma (3 years, 180 ECTS); Bachelor's degree (4 years, 240 ECTS); Master's degree (1 to 2 years, 90 or 120 ECTS); and PhD degree (3 to 4 years).

Cyprus has 53 HEIs, including 3 public and 5 private universities, and 3 public and 42 private non-university institutions (also referred to as institutions of tertiary education or colleges in the national legislation and / or the SAR). Universities offer Bachelor's, Master's and PhD degree programmes. Most programmes available at public non-university HEIs lead to non-degree qualifications, and private institutions provide a wide range of programmes from the Certificate to Master's degree level (except two research-oriented HEIs which offer PhD programmes). Academic qualifications awarded by private non-university HEIs are subject to a recognition process; it is conducted by the Cyprus Council for the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications (*KYSATS*) after a programme has been granted accreditation by CYQAA. In the recent years, the Government has sought to bring greater coherence and harmonisation into the diverse higher education landscape in Cyprus, and CYQAA is clearly intended as a tool expected to work in that direction.

Cross-border higher education (CBHE) may be provided by local HEIs in other countries (outbound CBHE) and by foreign HEIs in Cyprus (inbound CBHE). The countries where foreign HEIs providing inbound CBHE may be based include the EU Member States, European Economic Area (EEA) countries and Switzerland. As part of inbound CBHE, a Cypriot HEI may award qualifications on behalf of a foreign HEI based on a franchise agreement. The foreign HEI is responsible for the development of academic content and quality assurance of the qualification. Only franchise programmes are now offered as part of inbound CBHE. Qualifications awarded by foreign HEIs upon completion of a franchise programme may be recognised by *KYSATS* in accordance with the requirements laid down by law.

In total, 48 172 students were registered at HEIs in Cyprus in 2017/18 (Ministry of Education and Culture, Mapping of Higher Education in Cyprus, 2017/2018); 77% of all students are enrolled at universities and 23% at non-university HEIs. A large proportion of EU and non-EU students choose universities where they follow Master's and Bachelor's degree programmes. There are very few EU students at non-university HEIs, and most of non-EU students at private ones take programmes leading to a Bachelor's degree or 1- to-3-years qualifications.

#### **QUALITY ASSURANCE**

The current QA system has only recently been established. Until 2015, three bodies were involved in external quality assurance (EQA), aside from the Council of Ministers and the Minister of Education and Culture. The Council of Educational Evaluation-Accreditation (*SEKAP*) was responsible for external evaluation and accreditation of programmes offered by private non-university HEIs, with applications submitted on a voluntary basis. The Advisory Committee on Higher Education (*SETE*) advised the Minister on the establishment of public and private non-university HEIs and the registration of new programmes to be provided by the latter. The Evaluation Committee for Private Universities (*ECPU*) conducted external evaluations of private universities and their programmes. *SEKAP* and *ECPU* decisions required endorsement by the Minister. The Council of Ministers granted licences to private universities. There were no external evaluation or accreditation mechanisms for public HEIs. New

legislation passed by the House of Representatives in 2015 and 2016 set a uniform QA framework for all HEIs and established CYQAA as the only national QA body.

Currently, EQA includes the following seven processes (though some have not been conducted yet; see the section on CYQAA below): institutional, departmental, and programme evaluations / accreditation reviews; evaluations / accreditation reviews of joint programmes and of CBHE provided by local HEIs in other countries; assessment of conditions for the provision of CBHE by foreign HEIs in Cyprus; and audits. All of the processes are mandatory. Fees are charged from HEIs for external evaluation processes.

Private HEIs should be entered onto the relevant Registers in order to be established and operate. Public and private HEIs undergo initial / ex-ante and periodic / ex-post institutional and programme evaluations. Initial and periodic departmental evaluations are conducted only at public and private universities. Programmes at all types of HEIs are subject to initial and periodic programme evaluations. Periodic institutional, departmental, and programme evaluations are conducted every five years. Evaluation of joint programmes and of CBHE provided by local HEIs is based on the same arrangements as programme evaluation. Where accreditation is refused as a result of an evaluation, an HEI, department or programme has no legal basis to operate and is not allowed to enrol students. A private HEI or its programme is not entered onto, or is struck from, the relevant Register.

Assessment of conditions for the provision of CBHE by foreign HEIs is limited to checking whether formal conditions specified by law are fulfilled; these include accredited status of the foreign HEI concerned and its programme in the home country; and whether the qualification to be awarded would be the same and confer the same rights as in the home country. Assessment is conducted before the commencement of a programme, and approval by the agency is required. For information on audits, see the Background of the Review above.

EQA involves, to varying extents, three bodies: CYQAA, the Minister of Education and Culture, and the Council of Ministers. CYQAA conducts (or will conduct) all of the seven processes mentioned above and takes accreditation decisions which are binding upon the Minister. It submits its activity reports to the Minister and its Quality of Higher Education reports to the President of the Republic, the Council of Ministers, and the House of Representatives. The Minister enters private HEIs and their programmes onto, and strikes them from, the relevant Registers, based on CYQAA's accreditation decisions. During the validity period of its accreditation decision, the agency may conduct, on its own initiative or as recommended by the Minister, an evaluation to examine whether an HEI, department or programme continues to meet the accreditation criteria. The Council of Ministers appoints members of CYQAA's Council (the governing body) upon recommendation from the Minister who, in turn, is required to consult the Rectors Conference and professional bodies. For reasons specified by law (see ESG 3.3), the appointment of a CYQAA Council member may be terminated by the Council of Ministers upon recommendation from the Minister.

Key elements of internal quality assurance (IQA) are predefined by the legislation. All HEIs should implement an IQA policy and put in place QA mechanisms for programmes (approval, monitoring, and periodic review), teaching staff (qualifications and competences), student assessment, learning resources and student support; collection and analysis of programme management data; and publication of information on programmes and awarded qualifications. HEIs are also required to establish an Internal Quality Committee, with its composition (all internal stakeholders) and tasks specified by law, and submit a GIER to CYQAA every three years. First GIERs should be submitted by HEIs by November 2018.

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

CYQAA was established in November 2015 by the 2015 Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education and the Establishment and Operation of an Agency on Related Matters Law, as amended in 2016 (hereafter referred to as the QAA Laws). It took over the responsibilities of the three bodies (SEKAP, SETE, ECPU) previously involved in EQA, and assumed the responsibility for new EQA processes introduced by the QAA Laws (see above). Currently, it is the only national QA body recognised in the Republic of Cyprus.

CYQAA developed its EQA methodologies based on the national legislation and policy documents, and on European documents, including the ESG and the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. Due to the time needed to draft and enact the QAA Laws, a large number of programme accreditation applications from HEIs were forwarded by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) to the agency when it was set up. Thus, in the first years, priority was given to programme evaluations. Until October 2018, CYQAA conducted 6 institutional evaluations and evaluated 287 new and existing programmes, including 6 joint programmes; all 6 HEIs and 225 programmes were accredited, and 62 programmes were refused accreditation. The agency also reviewed and approved 3 applications as part of the assessment of conditions for the provision of CBHE by foreign HEIs. No departmental evaluation, evaluation of CBHE provided by local HEIs or audit was conducted until the time of the panel's site visit. By the end of 2020, CYQAA expects to have conducted around 740 programme evaluations (671 existing and 69 new programmes) and institutional evaluations of all 53 HEIs.

### **CYQAA'S ORGANISATION/STRUCTURE**

Pursuant to the QAA Laws, CYQAA's Council, the governing body, takes decisions in EQA processes; manages the budget and prepares annual activity reports; proposes legislative and other measures necessary for the agency to perform its functions; and advises the Minister of Education and Culture on QA-related matters. It is composed of 11 members: eight members with university management and QA experience who have the rank of Professor or Professor Emeritus (five from universities in Cyprus, and three from at least two other countries); two members from professional organisations; and a student. They are appointed, for up to two terms in office, and dismissed by the Council of Ministers upon recommendation from the Minister. The Minister consults the Rectors' Conference (a representative body of universities) and professional bodies about candidates. A student member is selected from among candidates proposed by the Pancyprian Federation of Student Unions (POFEN). The term of office is five years for all members, except a student member appointed for two years.

The Council elects the President and Vice-President from among its members. The President takes overall responsibility for the agency's activities, is the head of staff, convenes and chairs Council meetings, and has a casting vote in decision-making. The Vice-President assumes the President's powers in the case of the latter's temporary absence or incapacity. The Council may set up sub-committees for specific tasks (e.g. the agency's self-assessment).

The Council is supported by 11 staff, including one administrative officer, eight education officers (four recruited in September 2018) and two office assistants. The education officers are civil servants or teachers seconded from the civil service sector or the education sector (Ministry of Education and Culture) to CYQAA. All staff are involved in EQA processes.

### **CYQAA'S FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES, PROCEDURES**

EQA is the agency's core activity. Additionally, CYQAA's advises the Minister of Education and Culture on matters related to the EHEA and may be assigned other functions as provided for by national legislation. EQA activities include all seven processes outlined above: institutional, departmental, and programme evaluations / accreditation reviews; joint programme evaluations / accreditation reviews;

evaluations / accreditation reviews of CBHE provided by local HEIs in EU Member States and third countries; assessment of conditions for the provision of CBHE by foreign HEIs in Cyprus; and audit. A framework for CYQAA's processes is set by the QAA Laws.

CYQAA has one procedure for institutional, departmental, and programme evaluations and evaluations of joint programmes and CBHE provided by local HEIs. A panel of external experts, an External Evaluation Committee (EEC) appointed by CYQAA, analyses the application from an HEI, undertakes a site visit and produces a report which is sent to the HEI. Where any recommendations are made in the report, the HEI concerned is required to implement them and submit a response together with related evidence within three months, before the CYQAA Council takes an accreditation decision. The Council may grant or refuse accreditation or decide to have a second evaluation conducted. A second evaluation, based on the same procedure as the first one, is carried out when the evidence collected is insufficient; the CYQAA standards are not fully met for a positive decision, but the shortcomings are not significant enough for a negative decision; or issues are addressed by the HEI's response and evidence for the remedial action taken, but the Council needs final approval from the EEC confirming compliance with the standards. EEC reports and the agency's final reports / decisions are published on the CYQAA website.

As regards a follow-up between the evaluation cycles, pursuant to the QAA Laws, CYQAA has the right to ascertain whether HEIs continue to meet its standards during the validity period of accreditation. The follow-up involves a desk-based analysis of evidence from several sources, including, in particular, semester reports on programmes and information on changes that have occurred after the accreditation decision, submitted by HEIs to the agency (for details, see ESG 2.3). All post-accreditation changes require approval from the agency. Where follow-up findings show shortcomings or deviations from the standards, CYQAA requests clarifications and a site visit or a second evaluation may be undertaken.

As mentioned above, as part of the assessment of conditions for the provision of CBHE by foreign institutions in Cyprus, CYQAA examines whether the conditions laid down in the QAA Laws (i.e. whether an HEI is recognised and its programme accredited in its home country; the qualification is the same and confers the same rights as in the home country) are met. The process involves only a desk-based review (documents provided by the foreign and Cypriot HEIs concerned) conducted by CYQAA staff, with no EEC appointed. At the end, CYQAA issues a document confirming that all conditions specified by the QAA Laws have been fulfilled and the foreign HEI concerned is authorised to award a given qualification (for franchise programmes); or requesting additional documents or information where necessary. A list of franchised programmes is published on the CYQAA website. A follow-up action may be undertaken by CYQAA in the future, but no details are available yet as such an action would require an amendment to the QAA Laws.

For information on audits, see the Background of the Review section above.

Pursuant to the QAA Laws, CYQAA may recognise an evaluation which has been conducted by a QA body registered in EQAR under certain conditions. First evaluations of all HEIs operating in Cyprus may be conducted only by CYQAA; prior consent should be obtained from CYQAA to choose a given body; if not satisfied with an evaluation, CYQAA may conduct an additional one; the role of the body is limited to evaluation and does not cover accreditation (for further details, see ESG 3.6). Where a QA body is not registered in EQAR, CYQAA will conduct a full programme, departmental or institutional evaluation / accreditation review or evaluation / accreditation review of a joint programme or CBHE provided by local HEIs in other countries, in accordance with its regular procedure.

CYQAA is an ENQA affiliate, a full member of the International Network for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Higher Education (INQAAHE), and an affiliate of the European University Association (EUA). It collaborates with the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME) on standards for external evaluation of medical programmes. In 2016, it organised a conference on standards and guidelines for

QA in medical fields, with the WFME President as a keynote speaker. In 2017 and 2018, CYQAA Council members and staff participated in international conferences and events. These included the seminars on QA of blended and online programmes, the implementation of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, and leadership (co-)organised by ENQA.

#### **CYQAA'S FUNDING**

CYQAA is fully funded by the Government, with its budget set aside as a sub-section of the State budget approved by the House of Representatives of the Republic of Cyprus. The agency's overall budget is a separate section within the MOEC budget, and other sections of the MOEC budget provide funding to cover staff costs, costs of CYQAA's participation in international conferences, seminars and missions, and its contributions and fees paid to international organisations.

# FINDINGS: COMPLIANCE OF CYQAA WITH THE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA (ESG)

## ESG PART 3: QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES

### ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY, AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

**Standard:**

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.

#### **Evidence**

In accordance with the QAA Laws, CYQAA conducts only EQA activities; its mission, goals and objectives should be clearly defined in a public statement available on its website. In its mission statement, the agency aims *“to ensure the quality of Higher Education in Cyprus and to support, through the procedures provided by the relevant legislation, the continuous improvement and upgrading of higher education institutions and their programs of study”*. Its Quality Policy Statement identifies HEIs, students, public authorities and society at large as its stakeholders and emphasises the importance of building trust in its activities among the stakeholders.

The agency’s activities are scheduled on a six-month basis (SAR); its budget was set on an annual basis until 2018 and has now been approved for 2019-2020 (Meetings with the CYQAA President and MOEC representatives). The six-month planning approach was introduced as short-term goals had to be re-examined biannually in the initial years of the agency’s activity (Meeting with the CYQAA President). CYQAA’s 2016-2020 Strategic Plan (provided during the visit) defines a short-term goal to ensure the agency’s and HEIs’ full compliance with the ESG; a medium-term goal to promote a culture of systematic and qualitative self-assessment which can lead to self-improvement of HEIs; and a long-term goal to promote Cypriot higher education at international level. These are supplemented by objectives such as developing procedures, standards, and application forms for evaluations; applying for ENQA and EQAR membership; collecting feedback from stakeholders on a continuing basis; (re-)evaluating programmes, departments and HEIs; promoting quality culture through seminars, (self-)evaluation reports and continuous communication with HEIs; doing research and analyses. For each year, main areas of activity are listed together with the corresponding objectives. The activities carried out by the agency are described in the 2016 and 2017 Annual Activity Reports (provided to the panel).

The agency’s EQA activities include both initial and periodic evaluations. As required by the QAA Laws, periodic institutional, departmental, and programme evaluations, and evaluation of joint programmes and CBHE provided by local HEIs are carried out every five years. Assessment of conditions for the provision of CBHE by foreign HEIs is conducted before a programme is launched; arrangements for a sort of follow-up assessment are yet to be developed. By the time of the panel’s visit, CYQAA conducted 6 institutional and 287 programme, including joint programme, evaluations, and assessed 3 applications for CBHE to be provided by foreign HEIs. No departmental evaluation or evaluation of CBHE provided by local HEIs was undertaken yet. Around 740 initial and periodic programme

evaluations and 53 institutional evaluations will be conducted between October 2018 and the end of 2020. (SAR; Addendum to the SAR; updated statistics provided during the visit)

Aside from conducting evaluations, CYQAA has organised conferences and seminars for HEIs on the ESG and its own EQA methodologies and issues such as distance learning and quality standards for medical fields. It has also prepared and published on its website materials promoting best European and international practice (e.g. standards for medical fields; e-learning exams; course descriptions; work-based learning), based on reports of European organisations (ENQA, EQAR, EUA) and Internet research. These are intended to support QA capacity building of both the agency itself and HEIs. (SAR)

EQA processes are based on procedures and standards (see ESG 2.1 and 2.3) which were adopted by CYQAA following consultations with HEIs, and feedback is also collected on an ongoing basis (ESG 2.2). Institutional, departmental, and programme evaluations / accreditation reviews, and evaluations / accreditation reviews of joint programmes and of CBHE provided by local HEIs are conducted by EECs, including academic and other higher education experts, students and practitioners. The overwhelming majority (96%) of academic experts are international experts. Candidates for the pool of students-experts and professional experts are put forward by public universities and professional bodies respectively. Experts receive guidelines and a briefing. (See ESG 2.4). Assessment of conditions for CBHE provision by foreign HEIs is carried out by the agency. Evaluations end with a report to be published and a decision taken by the CYQAA Council against which HEIs may appeal (ESG 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7).

The CYQAA Council (the governing body; see the section on CYQAA) is composed of academics coming from public universities in Cyprus and overseas HEIs, representatives of professional bodies and a student. Academic members and professionals are appointed by the Council of Ministers upon recommendation from the Minister of Education and Culture who consults the Rectors' Conference (academics) and professional bodies (professionals). A student member is appointed by the Council of Ministers from among candidates put forward by POFEN. (QAA Laws; Meeting with representatives of POFEN and students-experts) Currently, the international members come from Greece and the United Kingdom, and the non-academic members from the Cyprus Scientific and Technical Chamber and the Cyprus Bar Association (CYQAA website).

The CYQAA Council members interviewed consider that CYQAA has won acceptance for its EQA activities among stakeholders; HEIs recognise its authority and appreciate the value of accreditation which helps them attract students and gain international recognition. Frequent formal and informal meetings with HEIs provide them with ample opportunities to discuss the agency's EQA policy and methodologies. As regards the composition of the Council, members do not represent individual HEIs but perform their function as academics. If the Laws were amended, both public and private universities could be represented in the Council; non-university HEIs still have much work to do in terms of their academic development. (Meetings with the CYQAA President and the Council, Part II).

The representatives of evaluated HEIs, the Rectors' Conference (for universities), the organisations of non-university HEIs, professional bodies and MOEC that the panel met all agree that the establishment of CYQAA was a radical positive development, and the agency has managed to establish a transparent system where public and private HEIs, and universities and non-university HEIs, are put on an equal footing. CYQAA has done a great job in helping HEIs recognise the importance of quality and pushing forward improvements, even if it was not easy for HEIs to introduce drastic changes in order to comply with CYQAA's strict standards. In this context, all the stakeholders highlighted the importance of the procedures and standards being published and the involvement of international academic experts in both the CYQAA Council and EECs. The representatives of HEIs are also satisfied with opportunities for formal and informal communication with the agency on its policy and any other matters (see also ESG 3.6). The Chairs of the organisations of non-university HEIs would be happy to have their representative

in the CYQAA Council as they are currently 'left out', and to put forward candidates for students-experts but emphasised that CYQAA was fair to all HEIs and ensured equal treatment.

### **Analysis**

The panel confirms that CYQAA's mission statement is available to all stakeholders on its website. It sets a clear overall aim of supporting quality improvement in higher education which can guide the agency's longer-term activity planning. There is, though, some mismatch between the mission statement and activities. As CYQAA acknowledged in the SAR and discussions with the panel, its EQA processes, which are now the main vehicle to carry the mission forward, currently focus more on controlling HEIs or ensuring compliance with requirements than on supporting HEIs in quality improvement (see also ESG 2.1 and 2.2). In the newly established QA system, the current control-oriented phase is, clearly, the first and necessary step on CYQAA's way towards supporting quality improvement. Nonetheless, the mission statement would need to integrate a compliance-assurance dimension to make it clear that the agency now performs a dual, controlling and supporting, function vis-à-vis HEIs.

While the EQA processes need to be refocused towards quality improvement after the control phase, CYQAA has sought to pursue its overall aim through capacity building activities (seminars and published materials) which may help HEIs put in place approaches based on best international practice. More extensive engagement in such activities could hardly be expected considering the pressure to conduct a large number of evaluations in the first three years after the agency's establishment. The panel also notes that seminars and analyses aimed specifically at supporting quality enhancement at HEIs are scheduled for the coming years in the 2016-2020 Strategic Plan.

CYQAA has accomplished the specific objectives set in the Strategic Plan for 2016-2018 (e.g. development of evaluation methodologies; ENQA and EQAR application). There is, though, room for improvement in CYQAA's activity planning so that it pursues more effectively its aims. While six-month plans are, in principle, based on the Strategic Plan, the latter is not yet a fully-fledged plan. Its goals are clear and aligned with the mission, but the plan, including the activity implementation schedule, is too sketchy to show how activities would lead towards the aim set in the mission statement. Since CYQAA now has a two-year budget, a more fine-grained plan would need to be devised at least for a two-year period. It should show how CYQAA pursues its overall aim and cover all activities, including EQA activities, those aimed at the agency's own development and supporting ones (e.g. development of an IT system, staff training, etc.). Such a plan could still leave space for CYQAA to respond to immediate and emerging needs on an ad-hoc basis.

It is evident that CYQAA conducts its EQA activities on a regular basis (even if some of its seven processes have not been conducted yet). Overall, the activities comply to a large extent with Part 2 of the ESG. The panel finds the agency to be fully compliant with ESG 2.2; substantially compliant with ESG 2.1, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5 and 2.7; and partially compliant with ESG 2.6. The panel's concerns are mainly about the strong focus on control in evaluations, including the follow-up phase, rather than on the effectiveness of IQA and quality improvement; no information about the selection of experts published on the CYQAA website, which does not make the process very transparent; guidelines on scoring for experts which would need to be improved to ensure greater consistency; no special training for students-experts, which limits their potential involvement and contribution; the quality of external evaluation reports, and the fact that not all of them are published; the appeals procedure which is not yet fully transparent (though this will be addressed by an amendment to the QAA Laws proposed by CYQAA) and the practice of handling complaints which would need to be formalised. For detailed comments, see the corresponding ESG sections.

All main stakeholders, including HEIs, academic staff, students, employers and MOEC, have a role to play in CYQAA's governance and EQA activities as those involved in the appointment of the CYQAA

Council, as Council members and / or as external experts. The panel also understands that there are various avenues for those who are not directly involved to contribute to CYQAA’s policies and activities. The legal framework is constraining for CYQAA, but this is understood by all stakeholders as a protection for the agency, and it does not seem to undermine in any way the agency’s independence in practice (see ESG 3.3). Extensive involvement of international academics is an evident strength; this maximises benefits for HEIs and enhances both the expertise of the agency and the transparency of its EQA activities, all particularly valuable in the newly established system, as the panel gathers from the feedback collected.

The CYQAA Council is not fully representative of the higher education sector in Cyprus as it does not include any faculty member from a non-university HEI, and only public universities put forward candidates for students-experts. On the one hand, CYQAA may wish to address this not only to ensure full representativeness, but also as a way of building QA capacity and encouraging faster development of the private sector and of non-university HEIs. On the other hand, the current arrangements have no impact on equal treatment of HEIs and are not a major issue for the organisations of non-university HEIs, and any change would need to be agreed among all main stakeholders.

Finally, the panel notes that CYQAA, despite its young age, is already perceived as a trustworthy institution by all of its stakeholders, and accepted by all of them as an agent bringing more coherence and harmonisation into the higher education landscape in Cyprus. Though the panel points to some issues above, none of these can be considered significant enough to undermine the trust that the agency has earned.

**Panel commendations**

The panel commends CYQAA for conducting its activities in a way which has inspired trust in the newly established external quality assurance system and promoted the value of quality among higher education institutions.

**Panel recommendations**

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

**Panel suggestions for further improvement**

CYQAA could consider initiating consultations among its stakeholders on extending the composition of its Council so that it is fully representative of the higher education sector.

**Panel conclusion: Substantially compliant**

**ESG 3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS**

Standard: Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognised as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.
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**Evidence**

CYQAA was established by, and operates in accordance with, the Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education and the Establishment and Operation of an Agency on Related Matters Laws (Law 136(I) of 2015 and 47(I) of 2016), referred to as the QAA Laws in this report. The Laws identify CYQAA

as the only national QA body in the Republic of Cyprus, specify its EQA responsibilities and state that it is funded from the State budget. CYQAA’s accreditation is required for HEIs to operate and provide programmes. Its accreditation decisions are binding upon the Minister of Education and Culture, and provide the basis for the Minister to enter private HEIs and their programmes onto the relevant Registers and for the Government to award funding to public HEIs. (QAA Laws; Laws on Private Universities and on the Institutions of Tertiary Education; Addendum to the SAR).

The SAR states that the “Higher Education Planning, Evaluation, Accreditation and Coordination Council’ (YODAK) is an illegal body operating under the purported ‘law’ of the so called ‘Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus’ (‘TRNC’) which, according to the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions and international law, is an illegal entity not recognized by the international community with the sole exception of Turkey”. As clarified further by the CYQAA resource person in the meeting with the panel, CYQAA does not conduct any activities in the so-called TRNC.

**Analysis**

The national legislation, other documents provided to the panel and its interviews during the site visit confirm that CYQAA has a clear legal basis for conducting all of its EQA activities and its decisions are recognised by all stakeholders in the Republic of Cyprus. It is also evident from the legislation that the agency operates as the only officially recognised QA body in the Republic of Cyprus.

**Panel conclusion: Fully compliant**

**ESG 3.3 INDEPENDENCE**

Standard: Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.
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**Evidence**

The QAA Laws state that the agency is independent to the extent necessary for it to do its work autonomously and perform independently its functions so that conclusions and recommendations contained in evaluation reports are not influenced by third parties such as HEIs, ministries or others.

MOEC provides premises, staff from the public and educational service and technical support to the agency and covers its operating costs (QAA Laws). CYQAA is funded by the Government, with its operational budget set aside as a separate sub-item of the State budget. The draft budget is submitted by CYQAA to the Minister of Education and Culture and then forms part of the MOEC budget. (SAR; QAA Laws) It is managed independently by the CYQAA Council; CYQAA forwards invoices to MOEC where they are only formally checked and paid (SAR; Meetings with the CYQAA President and MOEC).

CYQAA education officers are MOEC officers or civil servants seconded to the agency; hence, no contract signed with the agency. Based on a request from the CYQAA Council President specifying the number and qualifications of staff needed, MOEC proposes candidates from among those included in the civil service or education sector registers. In principle, a recruitment decision is taken jointly by the MOEC Permanent Secretary and the Council President (QAA Laws); in practice, the President has the final say. Staff work exclusively for the agency and take instructions from the Council. (SAR; Addendum; staff CVs; Meetings with CYQAA staff and MOEC).

As stated by the CYQAA Council President, MOEC is not in a position to refuse recruiting staff as they are required by law to provide adequate human resources. At the beginning, when MOEC was not fully familiar with how the agency worked, its involvement in recruitment was a constraint as the staff made

available were not adequate for the job; this issue has been resolved. According to the CYQAA President, administrative support provided by MOEC does not limit CYQAA's independence; actually, the agency saves a lot of time for its core activities; arrangements may be changed after some years, but currently they are fully satisfactory. As explained by the MOEC representatives, the Ministry's role is to provide CYQAA with what it needs to perform its tasks and pay the invoices it submits.

Elements of CYQAA's operational framework are predefined by the QAA Laws. These include the main stages of the procedure for evaluations / accreditation reviews (see ESG 2.3); the composition of EECs for each of these processes (see ESG 2.4); the procedure for the assessment of conditions for the provision of CBHE by foreign HEIs limited to desk-based review, and the conditions to be assessed in the process. The QAA Laws also state that detailed procedures and evaluation criteria for the EQA processes are adopted by CYQAA. Amendments to the QAA Laws are necessary (and have been drafted) to enable CYQAA to pay experts for extra work related to an evaluation (e.g. when they analyse additional documentation submitted by HEIs in order to advise the Council before it takes an accreditation decision; see ESG 2.3) or establish subcommittees of experts for institutional evaluations to be conducted in the coming years. (Meeting with international experts; final clarification meeting with CYQAA Council members)

The QAA Laws state that external experts are appointed by the agency. The CYQAA Council selects academic experts for the agency's pool and appoints experts for individual EECs from among those included in the pool and from lists of students-experts and professional experts provided by HEIs and professional bodies respectively (see ESG 2.4) (SAR; Addendum to the SAR). Pursuant to the QAA Laws, EEC members are not allowed to have had any professional, financial or personal relationship with an HEI, department or programme to be evaluated in the three years preceding their appointment; they are struck from the CYQAA pool for failure to disclose it. All EEC members sign a 'Statutory declaration confirming the absence of any conflict of interest of the members of external evaluation committees' (SAR, Annex 9; Meetings with experts). It defines a conflict of interest and states that experts are obliged to follow the principles of objectivity, impartial judgement and non-discrimination. Several experts have been struck from the CYQAA pool for failure to disclose a conflict of interest or improper attitude (Meeting with the SAR Group).

The CYQAA Council's decisions in EQA processes are based on, among other things, an EEC report (see ESG 2.5). EECs are not allowed to make any suggestions regarding accreditation decisions in their reports. The involvement of an EEC ends with the submission of a report or providing advice on whether its recommendations have been satisfactorily implemented in cases where the Council is not competent to assess that before taking a decision. Experts have no knowledge of the decisions taken unless they check this on the CYQAA website. Decisions of the Council are taken by a simple majority vote of the members present. (QAA Laws; SAR; EEC reports; Meetings with experts).

Council members are appointed by the Council of Ministers upon recommendation from the Minister of Education and Culture who consults the Rectors' Conference and the relevant professional bodies; candidates for a student member are proposed by POFEN. (QAA Laws) The Rectors' Conference is an advisory body and its advice is not binding upon the Minister (Meeting with MOEC). Council members may be dismissed by the Council of Ministers, upon the Minister's recommendation, before the end of the term due to prolonged illness, absenteeism or behaviour which is improper and incompatible with CYQAA's mission and goals. (QAA Laws) The QAA Laws also stipulate that members should perform their responsibilities independently and objectively and refrain from promoting in any way the interests of their home institution. Before each meeting, they are required to declare any possible personal interest in the outcome of the matter to be discussed and recuse themselves from discussion and voting in such cases. Failure to do so constitutes a behaviour which is incompatible with CYQAA's mission and goals and provides grounds for dismissal. (QAA Laws)

In November 2017, the Council adopted the Code of Conduct and Ethics which has been applied in Cyprus civil service since 2013. It lays down basic standards for behaviour in direct contact with citizens and ethical standards for handling citizens' matters, including impartiality and objectivity, credibility, accountability and transparency. Both Council members and staff are required to follow the Code. There has been no breach of the Code until now. For breaking the Code, staff would receive oral warning and be observed closely; in more serious cases, the matter would be referred to MOEC. (SAR; Meetings with CYQAA staff and the persons responsible for IQA in CYQAA)

All of the internal and external stakeholders interviewed emphasised that CYQAA's independence was guaranteed by law; it would be 'illegal' for CYQAA not to act independently or for external stakeholders to seek to influence its activities. CYQAA Council members and staff feel independent in performing their tasks and taking and implementing decisions. There is no pressure on experts, and this is a great strength of evaluations as Cyprus is a very small country (Meetings with national and international experts, and POFEN and students-experts). For the representatives of evaluated HEIs, CYQAA has an 'autonomous relationship at all levels', and it is important that it selects a mix of national and international experts for evaluations.

### **Analysis**

The QAA Laws are very explicit about CYQAA's independent status, and this is evidently perceived and appreciated by all of the stakeholders as an effective safeguard against possible interference of any party in the agency's activities. Also, in the panel's view, the strict rules laid down in the QAA Laws for Council members and experts, in the Code of Conduct for the Council and staff and in the no-conflict-of-interest declaration for experts provide a further safeguard for independence and impartiality of the individuals involved. The panel has found no evidence that the rules are not observed.

In legal terms, the QAA Law procedure for the appointment and dismissal of the CYQAA Council may provide space for the Council of Ministers and, in particular, the Minister of Education and Culture to influence the agency's activities. The Rectors' Conference acts only in an advisory capacity vis-à-vis the Minister who recommends candidates in the appointment process, and neither the Conference nor the CYQAA Council is consulted about the dismissal of a Council member. At the same time, considering the QAA Law provision about CYQAA's independence, the strict rules for Council members and the majority vote rule for the Council, there is little risk that the national authorities (should they wish to do so) could use the appointment arrangements as leverage. Also, the cases in which a Council member may be dismissed are clearly specified and could hardly be 'misinterpreted' to exert pressure. Nonetheless, to exclude the risk of being perceived as leaving room for interference, the current arrangements would better be revised, especially considering CYQAA's organisational ties with MOEC (see below). This could be done, for example, by strengthening the role of HEIs in the process of proposing or selecting candidates to be recommended to the Council of Ministers.

Similarly, though CYQAA manages its budget, the QAA Law arrangement where MOEC provides staff and administrative support raises concerns about possible interference. At the same time, in practice, both CYQAA and MOEC seem to adhere rigorously to the QAA Law provision on the agency's independence and MOEC's role seems to be really limited to 'servicing'. The panel understands that this has been a good arrangement, providing practical protection, in the initial years of the agency's activity. However, again, to exclude the potential risk of being (perceived as) influenced by MOEC, the agency should be clearly separated from MOEC so that its staff recruitment process does not involve MOEC and is not limited to selection from among MOEC or civil service candidates, and it has its own financial services. This would also address the issue of delays in catering to CYQAA's human resources needs on the part of the government services, identified as a weakness in the SWOT analysis.

As regards operational independence, while HEIs are consulted (see ESG 2.2), the panel confirms that it is CYQAA, and not any third party, that decides on details of its procedures, within the constraints placed by law (see below), and establishes criteria for EQA processes. It is also clear to the panel that, in both legal and practical terms, the agency is fully autonomous in selecting experts for its pool and for each evaluation; the fact that lists of students and professionals are provided by HEIs and professional bodies does not seem to put any constraint in this respect.

Though this extends beyond strictly interpreted ESG 3.3 which refers to ‘third-party’ influence, the QAA Laws go too far, in the panel’s view, in prescribing the agency’s procedures, even though this was not raised as an issue by any stakeholder. Operational arrangements such as whether a site visit should be conducted as part of an evaluation or the composition of expert panels are usually left to the discretion of an agency which is best placed to choose a suitable methodology. Even though the QAA Laws integrate a large part of the ESG, with such details regulated by law, CYQAA has too little autonomy to respond swiftly to an immediate need or adjust its methodologies based on the experience gained or the feedback collected from HEIs. This is also confirmed by the examples of simple practical issues given above which cannot be addressed without an amendment to the Laws. The panel understands that it was important for the agency to be protected by the law at the beginning of its activity, in order to have all rules and regulations accepted by all parties, HEIs and other stakeholders alike. Now when the agency seems to be fully accepted by all stakeholders, the panel believes that time has come to give the agency more autonomy in the design of its procedures.

The panel considers CYQAA to be fully independent in terms of decision-making in EQA. It has found no evidence that experts exert any influence on decisions, beyond expressing their views in evaluation reports or, if necessary, on the implementation of their recommendations by evaluated HEIs (ESG 2.3). CYQAA’s decisions do not require approval from any third party (and are binding on the Minister; see ESG 3.2). For the reasons explained above, it is also unlikely for the Council of Ministers, the Minister or MOEC in general to influence Council decisions in practice, despite their role in the appointment and dismissal of Council members and / or administrative support provided to CYQAA.

**Panel recommendations**

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

**Panel suggestion for further improvement**

CYQAA is encouraged to consider proposing amendments to the QAA Laws to extend its autonomy in devising procedures for the evaluation processes.

**Panel conclusion: Substantially compliant**

**ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS**

Standard: Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.
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**Evidence**

CYQAA prepares annual Activity Reports for the Minister of Education and Culture, and Quality of Higher Education Reports for the President of the Republic, the Council of Ministers and the House of

Representatives. Aside from an overview of activities, Annual Reports should provide general findings from evaluations. (QAA Laws; SAR) As stated in the SAR, the 2016 and 2017 Annual Reports provide both a description of CYQAA's activities and reflections on the quality of higher education, including issues and good practices (e.g. a large number of non-university HEIs with a small number of students as an issue pointing to the need to improve quality; good practices such as a merger of small HEIs, their focus on specialised practically oriented programmes; restructuring of e-learning provision at universities). The first Quality of Higher Education Report will be produced next year and will include general reflections on quality based on findings from CYQAA's evaluations and GIERs submitted by HEIs in November 2018. (Final clarification meeting with CYQAA Council members)

As stated in the SAR under ESG 3.4, CYQAA also publishes on its website materials based on reports of other organisations to promote best European and international practices among HEIs (e.g. on distance learning programmes, standards for Master's degrees and quality improvement in medical fields) (SAR; CYQAA website). Furthermore, CYQAA education officers produce analytical materials (SAR, Annex 6) for the Council and HEIs to gain a better understanding of selected issues (e.g. course descriptions; e-learning final exams; work-based learning). These are based on studies and reports published by European organisations (e.g. ENQA, EQAR and EUA).

As the panel learned from its representatives, a document discussing quality trends would be useful for MOEC. Some representatives of HEIs that the panel met think that EEC reports would provide a good basis for such a thematic analysis; others consider that the number of evaluations conducted by the agency is still too small to have a 'meaningful analysis', extending beyond statistical data (Meeting with the Rectors' Conference, organisations of non-university HEIs and professional bodies).

### **Analysis**

The panel agrees that it is too early to see clear trends in higher education in Cyprus, but it believes that nearly 300 programme evaluations which CYQAA has carried out so far would provide sufficient information to identify, at least, some areas of good practice and persistent difficulty across HEIs. It has read the Annual Reports and the other materials referred to in the SAR. The Annual Reports include few paragraphs which refer to some issues and good practices in higher education in Cyprus. This is not yet a thorough and systematic analysis of findings from the evaluations conducted which could feed into a national quality assurance policy or guide quality improvement at HEIs. CYQAA's documents describing good European and international practices extend beyond the scope of this ESG, though it is evident that they are much needed for capacity building both within CYQAA and at HEIs. Thus, at present, there is no publication that the panel could consider as a thematic analysis, as defined in ESG 3.4, and CYQAA acknowledges that such an analysis is yet to be conducted.

Though the panel's judgment may be based only on what is currently available, it should be noted that a systematic analysis of findings from GIERs is planned. The panel is confident that the agency has the necessary resources (see ESG 3.5) to produce thematic analyses that would be useful not only to the national authorities and HEIs, but also to itself as they may help re-focus its EQA processes more towards quality improvement (ESG 2.1 and 2.2). While CYQAA is required to discuss general findings in its official Quality of Higher Education Report for the national authorities, it may also be a good idea to produce a separate and more detailed publication in a 'reader-friendly' format for HEIs. After the first years of activity, thematic analysis should be published on a regular basis.

## Panel recommendations

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

## Panel conclusion: Non-compliant

### ESG 3.5 RESOURCES

Standard:

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

### Evidence

CYQAA is funded from the State budget; its operational budget forms part of the MOEC budget and is managed by the CYQAA Council (QAA Laws; SAR). Pursuant to the QAA Laws, MOEC should provide sufficient financial and human resources, premises and technical support for the agency to perform its functions. CYQAA's 2019-2020 budget, which has now been approved, shows a nearly double increase for each year as compared to 2018. Staff costs are covered from a separate section of the MOEC budget as staff are seconded (see ESG 3.3). (Addendum to the SAR; Meetings with the CYQAA Council President and MOEC representatives). As the MOEC representatives explained, the agency receives the funding requested as accreditation is given priority in the country, all programmes should be accredited by the end of 2020 and MOEC is required by law to provide CYQAA with adequate resources. The CYQAA Council President stated that there were no problems with funding.

CYQAA may propose legislative and other measures, including methods of earning revenues, necessary to pursue its mission and conduct its activities. It has drafted amendments to the QAA Laws whereby fees would be charged for all EQA processes (see the section on QA) and for second evaluations and appeals and would be deposited in the agency's account and included as a revenue in its budget (currently, kept in the Consolidated Fund of the Republic). (QAA Laws; SAR; Addendum to the SAR)

The agency has 11 staff members, including one administrative officer, eight education officers and two office assistants. Four education officers were provided by MOEC, as requested by CYQAA, after the submission of the SAR. (SAR; Addendum to the SAR; CVs of staff). Education officers coordinate evaluations and assess applications for CBHE to be provided by foreign HEIs. One of the newly recruited officers is responsible for IT, including the agency's website. The staff that the panel met are glad that their number has recently doubled as the last two years were difficult for them in terms of the workload. CYQAA staff participate in conferences and seminars organised mainly by European QA organisations, and in training provided by local institutions (e.g. on the CAF). They are encouraged to do so by the Council, and there is a fixed amount for training in the MOEC budget each year. CYQAA plans to have more systematic training for staff in quality assurance to enhance the overall expertise of the agency. (SAR; Meeting with staff)

Financial support and infrastructure (office space and equipment) provided by MOEC, the expertise of CYQAA Council members and competence and experience of staff are identified as strengths in the SWOT analysis. All three weaknesses in the SWOT analysis are related to resources: delays in catering to the agency's human resources needs on the part of the government services; lack of a clear organisational structure due to under-funding in the initial period of CYQAA's operation; and lack of an online platform for the submission and management of external evaluation applications and other

daily tasks. In the context of CYQAA's aims for the coming years, the SAR states that it will be a challenge to combine a large number of evaluations with additional tasks and QA policy-oriented or strategic development activities. As mentioned earlier, CYQAA estimates that roughly 740 initial and periodic programme applications for evaluation should be submitted by the end of June 2019 (as compared to 287 completed until now); it also intends to give priority to 53 institutional evaluations (Addendum to the SAR).

### **Analysis**

CYQAA evidently has a stable source of funding. It is also reassuring that the QAA Laws refer explicitly to sufficient resources to be provided to the agency. MOEC provides what the agency needs, as evidenced by a big budget increase and new staff, and the agency itself is proposing amendments on fees to the law which would further increase its income. The recently approved two-year budget is a welcome development as it helps the agency to plan its activities in the medium term.

As the agency has been running on a tight budget and with few staff until now, nearly 300 evaluations completed in the first years show CYQAA's efficiency in both organising its core activities and using its resources. It is also commendable that CYQAA has managed the little staff time available until recently efficiently enough to carry out some activities building its own and HEIs' QA capacity (for staff training, see above; for materials published, see ESG 3.1 and 3.4), though thematic analyses are yet to be produced (ESG 3.4). The panel had a tour of CYQAA's facilities and confirms that they are fully adequate in terms of work and meeting space and equipment.

Conducting around 740 evaluations between October 2018 and the end of 2020 is a huge task, but the panel considers that this is doable with the much higher budget, new staff and the experience gained. It also understands that the new budget and staff will resolve the issues in the SWOT analysis related to under-funding (an IT system and organisational structure) (for delays in catering to human resources needs, see ESG 3.3). Considering what has been achieved so far, the resources available also appear sufficient for CYQAA to organise seminars for HEIs and do research and analyses aimed at promoting quality culture which are scheduled in the Strategic Plan for 2016-2020 and 2019-2020 respectively. The panel also gathers from its meeting with MOEC representatives that more staff could be provided when needed.

The SAR refers to a challenge of combining evaluations with strategic development activities (though it was identified before the recruitment of new staff). A shortage of resources, resource planning or the management of available resources do not seem to be the underlying issue here. In the panel's view, CYQAA can handle the challenge if it improves its activity planning, shifting from six-month planning to careful two-year planning, as recommended under ESG 3.1 (and a good two-year activity plan would also further facilitate resource planning and management).

### **Panel commendations**

The panel commends CYQAA for managing its scarce resources in the initial years in a way which enabled it to combine core external quality assurance activities with some capacity development activities for itself and higher education institutions.

### **Panel conclusion: Fully compliant**

### ESG 3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Standard:

Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.

#### Evidence

CYQAA's Quality Policy Statement affirms its commitment to quality, transparency and accountability, and compliance with the ESG and national legislation. It emphasises that high professional standards and integrity and IQA are essential to the agency's credibility and trust of stakeholders. It also identifies mechanisms to pursue the policy; for example, the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) (a total management tool); activity planning and progress monitoring; the Code of Conduct and Ethics; guidance, briefing and templates for experts; staff training; stakeholder feedback collection; monthly meetings of the CYQAA Council to analyse feedback and integrate it into decision-making.

QA within CYQAA is a collective responsibility of the Council (Meeting with the persons responsible for IQA). An IQA system is being implemented for the entire agency. Currently, the main formal mechanisms include: the CAF being gradually introduced by a December 2017 decision of the Council, with staff being trained; the Code of Conduct and Ethics adopted by the Council in November 2017 and the no-conflict-of-interest declaration for EEC members (see ESG 3.3); a survey among EEC members introduced by a Council decision in February 2018; and a survey among HEIs conducted for the first time in March 2018 as part of CYQAA's self-assessment. (SAR)

The feedback questionnaire for EEC members (SAR, Annex 7), completed at the end of each evaluation, covers the evaluation procedure and criteria; briefing and practical arrangements; independence of experts and collaboration within an EEC; communication and collaboration with CYQAA, and its reliability, objectivity, professionalism, efficiency, transparency, clarity, quality, and accountability. Completed questionnaires were not yet analysed by the agency at the time of the panel's visit. In the future, this will be done every 6 months. Additionally, CYQAA evaluation coordinators collect oral feedback from experts at the end of a site visit. (SAR; Meetings with experts, POFEN and students-experts; CYQAA staff and CYQAA IQA persons; final clarification meeting with Council members)

All groups of experts interviewed are fully satisfied with opportunities to give feedback. Academic experts consider the briefing and guidelines for EECs to be very good, evaluations are very well organised, and the agency responds quickly to any ad-hoc suggestions or requests. As regards possible improvements, the list of standards could be simplified to avoid overlap; EECs could have more time for drafting reports; and experts could be informed by the agency about the final outcome of the evaluation they were involved in. For students-experts, the procedure and criteria for selection are not entirely clear, and some would like to have clearer guidelines on their role in evaluations and additional training. For further details, see ESG 2.2-2.4.

The questionnaire for the survey among HEIs (SAR, Annex 2) addressed the agency's procedures and criteria; expertise of EEC members; effectiveness and impact of evaluations in terms of quality improvement; communication and collaboration with CYQAA and its objectivity, reliability, transparency, consistency, and professionalism. Despite the low response rate (19 of 53 HEIs), findings were useful to CYQAA (SAR). Most of the respondents were satisfied with the agency's procedures and criteria and considered that the procedures were reliable and ensured objectivity. Some suggested improvements which concerned mainly the appointment of experts, their knowledge of the higher education system (see also ESG 2.4), and feedback on the performance of EECs which should be collected after the site visit. Findings from the 2018 survey are currently published only as part of the

SAR on the CYQAA website. The survey will be conducted on an annual basis and results will be published (Final clarification meeting with CYQAA Council members).

After each evaluation, HEIs submit a written response to an EEC report where they are supposed to give feedback and are free to comment on what they want. There is no template for an HEI's response as the agency prefers to collect feedback on a voluntary basis rather than instructing HEIs to fill in a questionnaire. HEIs also give oral feedback after each evaluation to CYQAA evaluation coordinators. There are various formal and informal meetings between the Council and HEIs, including regular meetings with heads of HEIs and HEI IQA officers where formal, though not written, feedback is collected. All these channels, including an HEI's response to an EEC report, may be used, for example, to complain about the expertise or conduct of experts. (Meetings with the SAR Group, CYQAA IQA persons, Heads of evaluated HEIs, and the Rectors' Conference, organisations of non-university HEIs and professional bodies).

All groups of representatives of HEIs interviewed are happy with the feedback opportunities they have. As the panel learned, suggestions concerning CYQAA's EQA standards are taken into consideration (see ESG 2.2) and, except for one or two, EEC members are considered very good or excellent (ESG 2.4). As the agency is new, the representatives of HEIs also see some space for improvement. For example, the selection procedure for experts could be clearer and the agency could expedite the evaluation process. Some representatives also suggested that CYQAA could organise once or twice a year a meeting with heads of HEIs specifically to discuss QA issues in general and its methodologies, and establish an international 'study committee' to advise it on higher education and QA issues.

There is no mechanism for collecting written feedback from CYQAA staff. Staff are free to share their views in formal staff meetings and any time they wish as they have easy access to Council members on a daily basis. Evaluation coordinators are the first ones to receive external feedback as they act as 'an intermediary' between HEIs and EECs; they discuss any problems immediately with the Council. (SAR; Meetings with CYQAA staff and IQA persons)

Self-monitoring or self-evaluation is considered by the CYQAA Council to be an on-going process. The Council has monthly meetings to reflect on the EQA methodologies, discuss any issues identified through such self-analysis and the feedback collected, and take decisions to make improvements. As a result, for example, the evaluation criteria for programmes and teaching staff were rephrased to make them more specific and clearer to HEIs; as some conflict-of-interest cases were detected, the no-conflict-of-interest declaration was revised and is now signed by experts before appointment; experts identified as 'problematic', based on feedback from HEIs and education officers, were struck from the CYQAA pool. (Meetings with the SAR Group, CYQAA IQA persons and staff)

### **Use of the results of another agency**

*(to be addressed under ESG 3.6 according to EQAR's document 'Use and Interpretation of the ESG')*

CYQAA does not subcontract any of its tasks to a third party. However, pursuant to the QAA Laws, it may recognise an evaluation of an HEI operating in Cyprus conducted by another QA body provided that: (a) the body is registered in EQAR, regardless of whether there is an agreement on mutual recognition of decisions between CYQAA and the body; and (b) the HEI concerned has obtained prior consent from CYQAA to choose the specific body for that purpose. In case there is no agreement on recognition, CYQAA may conduct an additional evaluation if it is not satisfied with the evaluation carried out by the other body. Furthermore, another QA body may be used as in cases (a) and (b) above under the following additional conditions: (i) its role is limited to evaluation and does not include accreditation; (ii) it may not be used for an evaluation of a private university during the period covered by an initial licence for operation (previously issued by the Council of Ministers); and (iii) the costs of an evaluation by such a body are covered by the HEI itself in the case of a public HEI. Moreover, first

evaluation of all HEIs operating in Cyprus may be conducted only by CYQAA. As clarified by the CYQAA Council (Meeting, Part II), the provision about the recognition of an evaluation of an HEI operating in Cyprus is understood broadly as referring to an evaluation of an HEI, department or programme.

As the Council clarified further, in case an agency is not registered in EQAR, CYQAA will conduct a full programme, departmental or institutional evaluation, or a full evaluation of a joint programme or CBHE provided by local HEIs in other countries, based on its own procedures and standards.

As explained in the Introduction, inbound CBHE may be provided by HEIs based in an EU Member State, EEA country or Switzerland. CYQAA's assessment is limited by the QAA Laws to checking whether the following formal conditions specified in the Laws are fulfilled: whether the foreign HEI concerned is recognised and authorised to provide a given programme and award a given qualification in its home country; the programme is accredited by an authorised and recognised agency in the HEI's home country; and the qualification to be awarded will be the same and confer the same (professional) rights as in the HEI's home country. In accordance with the QAA Laws and the General Prosecutor's decision, the process involves only a desk-based review where CYQAA verifies that all the required documents are submitted by the HEIs concerned. These include: evaluation reports from a QA agency which demonstrate that the foreign HEI is recognised and the programme accredited; details about services and facilities to be offered by the HEIs concerned, student admission, assessment and graduation, and teaching staff; and agreements between the HEIs. Where all the required documents are submitted, CYQAA issues a document which confirms that all the conditions specified by the QAA Laws have been fulfilled and (for franchise programmes) that the foreign HEI concerned is authorised to award a given qualification. It also states that the programme is required to meet CYQAA's evaluation standards, based on the ESG, which are published on its website. (Examples provided to the panel) A qualification awarded by a foreign HEI may be recognised by KYSATS if it fulfils the requirements laid down in the legislation (regulations published on the MOEC and KYSATS websites). The SAR states that the responsibility for inbound CBHE rests mainly with the foreign HEI concerned as CYQAA's assessment is limited to a desk-based review; CYQAA's experience shows that some franchise programmes do not fully comply with the ESG, mainly due to lack of 'appropriate control' from the foreign HEIs concerned.

### **Analysis**

The Quality Policy Statement explains clearly not only the values and principles underlying CYQAA's activities but also how it seeks to keep its quality promise (even though all formal feedback collection methods, including surveys, could be explicitly mentioned). The panel confirms that the policy statement is published on the agency's website. It also notes that despite being very young, the agency has made a consistent effort to put in place a number of formal mechanisms for IQA.

In the panel's view, the formal and informal feedback collection mechanisms taken jointly are sufficient to provide CYQAA with the information it needs to know where it is performing well and where improvements should be made. The surveys among HEIs and EEC members are wide enough in scope to cover all relevant aspects of CYQAA's EQA activities, and both will be conducted on a regular basis and results published. Informal or oral feedback collected after each evaluation from all those involved (HEIs, experts, CYQAA evaluation coordinators), in combination with an HEI's formal response to an EEC report, if it wishes to give feedback there, enable the agency to address any problems that may arise on an ongoing basis. There is also evidence that CYQAA both regularly analyses and acts upon the feedback collected, and a formal mechanism is in place to do so (monthly Council meetings). The agency is evidently perceived as open and responsive to suggestions for improvement, eager to learn and accountable. This may be further reinforced if CYQAA organises (bi-)annual meetings on QA for HEIs, as suggested by heads of evaluated HEIs.

At the same time, while CYQAA, experts and HEIs are fully satisfied with the current arrangements, the panel considers that there is too much reliance on informal or oral feedback, in particular, from HEIs. CYQAA should 're-design' the post-evaluation response that each HEI submits so that it can serve as a fully-fledged and formal mechanism for collecting structured feedback after each evaluation. For greater transparency, HEIs would need to be explicitly requested (which does not mean that they would be required) to provide feedback in their responses. Preferably, they would be requested to do so according to predefined aspects to be addressed so that findings are comparable (aside from space for any other comments HEIs may have). This would provide a more reliable basis for CYQAA to review its performance and processes in a systematic way, especially considering that the rate of response to the survey which will be conducted annually was low. Regardless of this, the panel understands that reliance on informal feedback is part of culture in a small country like Cyprus, as emphasised by all the groups interviewed, and the current arrangements do not in any way affect the stakeholders' perception of the agency's integrity (see also ESG 3.3) and seem to reinforce the positive perception of its responsiveness and accountability.

Judging from the HEI survey findings and all the interviews during the visit, CYQAA handles its tasks in a professional way and both Council members and staff are very committed to the job. The panel also notes that the agency continuously enhances its expertise by studying best European and international practices (see ESG 3.4) and through staff training (see ESG 3.5). Additionally, it may indeed be useful for CYQAA to have an international committee advising the Council on higher education and QA issues, as suggested by representatives of some HEIs. In the panel's view, the selection criteria are rigorous enough for CYQAA to have a pool of competent academic experts (for further comments about experts, see ESG 2.4). As the examples of experts struck from the pool discussed with the panel show, CYQAA enforces ethical standards of the no-conflict-of-interest declaration, and the panel has found no evidence that the Council or staff fail to comply with the Code of Conduct. There should be, however, a mechanism for ensuring comparably high quality of external evaluation reports produced by experts; see ESG 2.6.

It is clear that CYQAA can recognise only evaluations conducted by EQAR-registered agencies; in other cases, a full programme, departmental, institutional evaluation or evaluation of a joint programme or CBHE provided by local HEIs in other countries conducted by CYQAA would ensure ESG-compliance to the extent that its own activities comply with the ESG. The recognition arrangements appear to be fully adequate to ensure ESG compliance, especially considering that CYQAA may conduct an additional evaluation, if it is not satisfied with the one conducted by another agency, even in case the agency is registered in EQAR. It is too early to see how the arrangements work in practice as, pursuant to the QAA Laws, first evaluations are 'reserved' for CYQAA and the first evaluation cycle is still ongoing.

The assessment of conditions for CBHE provision by foreign HEIs can be considered as a sort of recognition process since CYQAA recognises or accepts other agencies' evaluation reports as valid documents confirming that the related conditions for CBHE provision are fulfilled. In principle, the process ensures ESG compliance as, in accordance with the QAA Laws, CYQAA may recognise only an evaluation conducted by an agency registered in EQAR. In practice, as the SAR acknowledges, the Laws limit in a way CYQAA's 'power' to ensure ESG compliance as the assessment process may involve only a desk-based review; CYQAA is not allowed to conduct, for example, a site visit or an additional assessment even when, as mentioned in the SAR, there is evidence that a programme accredited by another (EQAR-registered) agency does not comply fully with the ESG. CYQAA's limited responsibility is duly reflected in the document issued upon completion of the process which confirms only that the conditions specified by the Laws are fulfilled, and in the 'approved' rather than 'accredited' status of the programme concerned. The responsibility for ensuring ESG compliance rests mainly with the

foreign HEI concerned, as emphasised in the SAR, but also with the agency which conducts an evaluation of the foreign HEI and its programme.

#### **Panel recommendations**

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

#### **Panel suggestions**

CYQAA may consider establishing an international committee to advise the Council on higher education and quality assurance issues.

#### **Panel conclusion: Substantially compliant**

### **ESG 3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES**

Standard:

Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.

#### **Evidence**

CYQAA was established in November 2015. This is the first external review of the agency. The review is conducted as part of the agency's applications for ENQA membership and registration in EQAR. CYQAA is required by the QAA Laws to undergo an external review based on the requirements set by EQAR (and agencies wishing to be included in EQAR should demonstrate that they operate in substantial compliance with the ESG). The agency makes an explicit commitment in its Quality Policy Statement to comply with the ESG. The SAR states that CYQAA intends to undergo periodically external reviews conducted by ENQA and other European and international QA bodies, as required. Compliance with the ESG was highlighted as a top priority in all interviews the panel had during the site visit.

#### **Analysis**

Based on all the evidence collected, the panel is confident that the agency is committed to meeting the obligations of an ENQA member.

#### **Panel conclusion: Fully compliant**

### **ESG PART 2: EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE**

Note from the panel: In the panel's view, the assessment of conditions for the provision of CBHE by foreign HEIs is closer to a recognition process than an EQA process as it is understood in Part 2 of the ESG. As explained under ESG 3.6, it is limited to checking whether formal conditions (accredited status of the foreign HEI concerned and its programme in the home country; and whether the qualification to be awarded by the foreign HEI would be the same and confer the same rights as in the home country) are fulfilled. It does not aim to evaluate, assure, monitor or improve quality, but rather to ensure that the programme to be provided and the qualification to be awarded are not of a lower standard than in the foreign HEI's home country. It is largely based on evaluations conducted by other QA agencies, and the responsibility for quality rests mainly with the foreign HEI awarding a given qualification and the QA agency which has accredited the HEI and its programme. As the ToRs for this review include

the process among those to be assessed against the ESG, the panel provides evidence and comments on it in the following sections but takes into consideration its specificity. For information on audits, see the Background of the Review section.

## **ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE**

Standard:

External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.

### **Evidence**

The QAA Laws state explicitly that CYQAA's evaluations should take into account the ESG. The agency has separate sets of criteria or standards for institutional, departmental, and programme evaluations / accreditation reviews (see the mapping table from the SAR below) and the assessment of conditions for the provision of CBHE by foreign HEIs in Cyprus (briefly described below). There is one basic set of standards for evaluations of programmes at all levels, with additional ones for distance learning (DL) and PhD programmes. (QAA Laws; SAR, Annexes 3-5; Addendum to the SAR).

Evaluations / accreditation reviews of joint programmes and of CBHE provided by local HEIs in other countries are conducted according to the standards for programme evaluation. For joint programmes, CYQAA also applies a number of its own additional standards and the standards defined in the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. (SAR; Addendum to the SAR). The agency's additional standards include: an agreement between the cooperating HEIs; joint development of the programme; mobility of students and staff; added value of the jointness of the programme in terms of efficiency and accountability; and short- and long-term impact of the collaboration; the experience gained and the raising of standards as a result of joint development and delivery of the programme

In the assessment of conditions for the provision of CBHE by foreign HEIs in Cyprus, CYQAA's responsibility is limited to examining whether a number of conditions laid down by the QAA Laws are fulfilled. For details, see ESG 3.6.

The ESG mapping table in the SAR covers institutional, departmental, and programme evaluations, and evaluations of CBHE provided by local HEIs and of joint programmes insofar as these are based on the programme evaluation standards. For these processes, the SAR acknowledges that some aspects of Part 1 of the ESG are not at all or fully addressed by the agency's standards; see the Analysis below.

The QAA Laws specify a number of elements that HEIs should incorporate into IQA: a QA policy; QA mechanisms for programme approval, monitoring and review, teaching staff (qualifications and competence), student assessment, learning resources and student support; programme data management; and publicly available information on programmes. The Laws also predefine the composition and responsibilities of an Internal Quality Committee to be established by each HEI.

All of the stakeholders that the panel met emphasised that by the time when CYQAA was established, very few HEIs had put in place basic conditions for quality education (e.g. a programme structure, course contents aligned with the aims of a programme or the degree awarded, academic qualifications of teaching staff, teaching and learning facilities). Against this background, CYQAA's responsibility is to ensure that HEIs comply with the requirements as defined in the law and evaluation standards. As the panel learned from the representatives of HEIs (Meetings with Heads of evaluated HEIs, HEI IQA officers, and the Rectors' Conference and organisations of non-university HEIs), to comply with the CYQAA standards, HEIs had to put in place committees, establish or revise QA procedures, hire new staff

and upgrade infrastructure and libraries. QA is yet to be widely accepted by teaching staff. The law and the CYQAA criteria are and should be strict as HEIs should demonstrate that they fulfil the standards.

The responsibility for quality lies with HEIs, but CYQAA may stimulate this; the agency is now more on the controlling side, but this is necessary before HEIs can move on to a 'higher level of quality'. See also related evidence under ESG 2.2.

CYQAA (Meeting with the Council, Part I) understands student-centred learning (SCL) as embracing the diversity of students, different learning modes and teaching and learning methods, student assessment methods, and student participation in governance, including quality management; thus, in fact, it is addressed by all evaluation standards. As emphasised by the national experts interviewed, much attention in programme evaluations is paid to whether students can follow their own learning path and teachers ensure active involvement of students in the classroom and assign coursework to students (projects, Internet-based assignments) which relies on, and develops, creativity.

The panel has analysed the standards applied by CYQAA and six external evaluation reports.

**ESG Mapping Table (SAR)**

<b>ESG</b>	<b>CYQAA standards for Institutional Evaluation</b>	<b>CYQAA standards for Departmental Evaluation</b>	<b>CYQAA standards for Programme Evaluation*</b>
1.1. Policy for QA	1.1.1, 1.1.2, 1.1.5, 1.1.6, 2.1.1, 2.1.2, 2.1.3, 2.1.4, 2.2.3, 2.2.5, 3.1.8, 6.1.5	1.1.1, 1.1.2, 1.1.5, 1.1.6, 2.1.1, 2.1.2, 2.1.3, 2.1.4, 2.2.3, 2.2.5, 3.1.8	2.3.1, 2.3.2, 2.3.3, 2.3.4
1.2. Design and approval of programmes	1.1.4, 2.2.1, 2.2.4, 4.1.1, 4.1.2, 4.1.3, 4.1.4	1.1.4, 2.2.1, 2.2.4, 4.1.1, 4.1.2, 4.1.3, 4.1.4	1.1.3, 2.1.1, 2.1.2, 2.1.3, 2.1.4, 2.1.5, 2.1.6, 2.1.7, 2.2.1, 2.2.2, 2.2.3, 2.2.4, 2.2.5, 2.2.6, 2.2.7, 2.2.9, 2.4.1, 2.4.2, 2.4.3, 2.4.4, 2.5.1, 2.5.2, 5.3
1.3. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	2.2.2, 2.2.6, 4.2.4, 4.2.5	2.2.2, 2.2.6, 4.2.4, 4.2.5	1.1.2, 1.1.3.5, 1.1.3.6, 1.1.5, 1.1.6, 1.1.7, 1.1.9, 1.1.12, 1.2.1, 1.2.3, 1.2.4, 1.2.5, 2.2.9, 2.4.5.7, 5.1
1.4. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	2.2.8, 2.2.10, 4.2.2	2.2.8, 2.2.10, 4.2.2	1.1.1, 1.1.3.1, 1.1.3.2, 1.1.3.3, 1.1.3.4, 1.1.3.5, 2.4.5, 2.4.6, 2.5.1, 2.5.2, 2.5.3, 2.5.4, 4.1.2, 5.7
1.5. Teaching staff	1.3.1, 1.3.3, 5.1.1, 5.1.2, 5.1.3, 5.1.4, 5.1.5, 5.1.6, 5.1.7, 6.1.3, 6.1.6, 6.1.7, 6.1.9, 6.1.10	1.3.1, 1.3.2, 5.1.1, 5.1.2, 5.1.3, 5.1.4, 5.1.5, 5.1.6, 5.1.7, 6.1.3, 6.1.5, 6.1.6, 6.1.8, 6.1.9	1.2.6, 1.3.1, 1.3.2, 1.3.3, 1.3.4, 1.3.5, 1.3.6, 1.3.7, 1.3.8, 1.3.9, 1.3.10, 1.3.11, 3.1.1, 3.1.2, 3.1.3, 3.1.4, 3.1.5, 3.1.6, 3.1.7, 3.1.8, 4.2.7, 4.3.1, 5.2, 5.5, 6.4
1.6. Learning resources and student support	2.2.11, 3.1.2	2.2.11, 3.1.2	1.1.4, 1.2.6, 2.2.9, 2.3.2, 2.3.3, 4.1.2, 4.1.3, 4.2.1, 4.2.2, 4.2.3, 4.2.4, 4.2.5, 4.2.6, 4.2.7, 5.17
1.7. Information management	1.1.7, 1.2.4, 2.2.10, 3.1.2	1.1.7, 1.2.4, 2.2.10, 3.1.2	2.6.1, 2.6.2, 4.1.1, 5.4, 5.7
1.8. Public information	1.1.1, 1.2.2, 2.2.7	1.1.1, 1.2.2, 2.2.7	2.4.5
1.9. On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	1.1.3, 4.1.1, 4.1.2	1.1.3, 4.1.1, 4.1.2	1.1.8, 1.1.10, 1.2.7, 2.2.8, 2.4.1, 2.4.7, 2.6.2, 2.6.3, 3.1.2, 4.1.2, 4.2.6, 5.4, 5.15
1.10. Cyclical external quality assurance	Pursuant to the QAA Laws, evaluations / accreditation reviews are conducted every five years.		

\*The same standards apply to evaluation of joint programme and of CBHE provided by local HEIs in EU Member States and third countries, but there are additional standards for joint programmes (see above).

## Analysis

Institutional, departmental, and programme evaluations, including evaluations of joint programmes and of CBHE provided by local HEIs as based on the programme evaluation standards, are mandatory for HEIs (departmental evaluations only for universities). Thus, the panel considers the CYQAA standards for these processes to be complementary. In its view, the SAR mapping table reflects fairly accurately the correspondence between the CYQAA standards and Part 1 of the ESG and, overall, the CYQAA standards jointly address to a large extent Part 1 of the ESG.

CYQAA's programme evaluation standard indicated as corresponding to [ESG 1.1](#) does not actually refer to a QA policy, focusing on procedures and internal stakeholder involvement. This gap is filled by the corresponding CYQAA standards for institutional and departmental evaluations which address a QA policy, except that there is no explicit reference to the policy being published, measures against intolerance and discrimination and, as noted by CYQAA itself, external stakeholder involvement.

[ESG 1.2](#) is addressed in more general terms by the corresponding CYQAA standards for institutional and departmental evaluations (e.g. programmes aligned to the aims of an HEI's development aims; design and approval mechanisms; integration of theory and practice). This is complemented by the programme evaluation standards which cover most ESG aspects, though they could refer more explicitly to student and external stakeholder involvement in programme design or to the level of qualifications in the NQF or EQF. The panel agrees with CYQAA that two of the four Council of Europe purposes of higher education, preparation for active citizenship and personal development, are not adequately reflected in the programme evaluation standards.

The institutional and departmental evaluation standards integrate selected aspects of [ESG 1.3](#) (e.g. student assessment; communication between teachers and students; student evaluation of teaching). The programme evaluation standards incorporate all aspects of the ESG related to learning and teaching. However, as noted by CYQAA itself, its standards would need to incorporate the following student assessment aspects: assessors' familiarity with existing testing and examination methods; support for assessors in developing their skills; more than one examiner carrying out assessment, where possible; and mitigating circumstances to be taken into account in assessment regulations.

CYQAA's standards for all the processes seem to cover jointly all aspects of [ESG 1.4](#), though they do not refer explicitly to the Lisbon Convention in the context of recognition. The programme evaluation standards address all phases, from student admission to progression, recognition, and certification; those for institutional and departmental evaluations address selectively admission, progression, and recognition. This is not an issue as the processes are complementary. However, CYQAA could consider addressing all phases, including completion, graduation, and certification, for institutional evaluation as such matters are usually regulated at institutional level.

All aspects of [ESG 1.5](#), including recruitment, competence and development of teaching staff, incentives for research activity, and integration of research findings into teaching, are incorporated into the corresponding CYQAA standards. In addition to the aspects covered by the other processes, the programme evaluation standards give due consideration to specific skills and experience, training and support for staff teaching DL programmes. [ESG 1.6](#) seems to be fully translated into the relevant CYQAA standards. Two aspects – how student needs are taken into account in resource planning and how the fitness-for-purpose of support facilities and services is reviewed – could be addressed more explicitly than only through broader standards on staff and student involvement in management (institutional / departmental evaluations) or in QA (programme evaluation). CYQAA's standards for all processes address in a complementary way all aspects of [ESG 1.7](#), including the collection and use of

data for effective planning of academic development, and data on student performance, learning resources and student support, and graduate employment.

ESG 1.8 is fully reflected in the standards for all processes, though they could refer more explicitly to graduate employment data in the context of the scope of information to be published by HEIs. Programme monitoring and review as part of ESG 1.9 is taken into consideration in all processes and, understandably, in a more detailed way by the programme evaluation criteria. Overall, the ESG is fairly accurately translated into the CYQAA standards. Ideally, though, they would emphasise more strongly the periodicity of programme reviews and address more explicitly the involvement of students and other stakeholders, including employers, in programme review and improvement (the standards currently refer in more general terms to student evaluation of courses, relevance of programmes to labour market and societal needs or to benefits for society).

Finally, the panel confirms that the evaluation processes are conducted every five years, in line with ESG 1.10, with the interval defined by the QAA Laws.

It is positive that EECs give much consideration to aspects such as SCL which are not easy. Taking SCL as an example, the panel notes, though, that not all of the evaluation reports examined are sufficiently detailed to see how thoroughly the compliance with each CYQAA standard is addressed by EECs in practice. Though the comment extends beyond strictly interpreted ESG 2.1, this also concerns the standards defined in the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (based on the ESG) which are applied by CYQAA. In the panel's view, joint programme evaluation reports could give more consideration to aspects such as: teaching and learning approaches designed so as to cater to the needs of students from different cultural backgrounds; specific challenges of mobile students taken into account as part of student support services; international experience of teaching staff; and IQA processes applied jointly by the partner HEIs. The panel's concerns about reporting are taken into account in its judgment under ESG 2.6.

ESG 2.1 is built around the primary responsibility of HEIs for quality and the role of EQA as recognising and supporting institutional responsibility for QA. The QAA Laws prescribe how HEIs should assure quality to the extent that the responsibility for QA is largely shifted from HEIs to CYQAA which should ensure compliance with the requirements. Judging from the feedback collected and the external evaluation reports examined, CYQAA's evaluations / accreditation reviews focus more on controlling than supporting HEIs in quality improvement – that is more on checking whether all the necessary conditions and IQA mechanisms are in place than on how effective IQA is. This approach is justifiable considering the very early stage of development of QA in Cyprus and the huge work to be done by both HEIs and CYQAA to have basic conditions for quality in place and develop HEIs' self-regulation capacity. CYQAA sees the control-oriented phase as paving the way to the quality improvement phase (see ESG 2.2). In the panel's view, evaluations should be gradually refocused towards support for HEIs in quality improvement and the effectiveness of IQA after the first cycle of evaluations.

Further to the comments on recognition under ESG 3.6 and the note above, the panel considers that ESG 2.1 does not apply to the assessment of conditions for the provision of CBHE by foreign HEIs as the process is limited by the QAA Laws to checking a number of formal conditions rather than designed to address internal quality assurance.

### **Panel recommendations**

CYQAA should (1) incorporate into its standards the few aspects of Part 1 of the ESG, including external stakeholder involvement, which are currently not or not explicitly addressed; and (2) gradually shift the focus in its processes after the first accreditation cycle from controlling institutions to supporting

them in carrying their responsibility for quality and in quality improvement, with due consideration to be given to the effectiveness of internal quality assurance.

### **Panel suggestions**

Further to the suggestion made by representatives of HEIs (see ESG 3.6), CYQAA could consider organising regular meetings on quality assurance for institutions to help them take greater responsibility for quality.

### **Panel conclusion: Substantially compliant**

## **ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE**

### **Standard:**

External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.

### **Evidence**

QA is defined in the QAA Laws as ‘systematic confirmation of the continuous assurance and improvement of the quality level’. Evaluations of HEIs, departments and programmes, and of joint programmes and CBHE provided by local HEIs are conducted to make a judgment on quality and lead to an accreditation decision. Accreditation confirms compliance with the standards and is required for HEIs, departments and programmes to operate. Assessment of CBHE to be provided by foreign HEIs aims to check compliance with conditions for provision specified by the QAA Laws (see ESG 3.6).

In its mission (see ESG 3.1), CYQAA aims at ensuring quality of higher education and supporting HEIs in continuous quality improvement. As explained in the SAR, since CYQAA is a new body and IQA is new to HEIs, EQA now tends to be supervisory in nature, and outcomes of evaluation are used to grant permission for programmes and HEIs to operate. The agency aims to develop ‘self-regulation skills and attitudes’ at HEIs and build a quality culture where HEIs are capable of enhancing their QA procedures and mechanisms. The main challenge is to develop a quality culture within which the system will evolve towards an improvement-oriented model of EQA.

The QAA Laws predefine elements of CYQAA’s methodologies such as the main stages of the procedure and categories of experts to be involved in evaluations / accreditation reviews, and the assessment of conditions for the provision of CBHE by foreign HEIs to be limited to desk-based review (see also ESG 3.3 and 3.6). The standards for evaluations / accreditation reviews (ESG 2.1) and application templates for HEIs are designed by the agency (SAR). Currently, the templates for evaluation / accreditation applications (SAR, Annex 3-5) do not provide space for describing quality improvements as the first evaluation cycle is still ongoing; they will be redesigned for the second cycle to address improvements (Meeting with the CYQAA Council, Part I). All EQA processes end with a decision taken by the Council (see ESG 2.5); a follow-up process is in place for evaluations / accreditation reviews (see ESG 2.3). For information on the assessment of conditions for CBHE provision by foreign HEIs, see ESG 3.6.

CYQAA developed its detailed procedures and standards based on the national legislation and the ESG (SAR). Draft documents, including templates for internal and external evaluations and standards, were sent to all HEIs and discussed in meetings with HEIs’ Internal Quality Committees and Heads of HEIs (SAR; Meetings with Heads of evaluated HEIs, the Rectors’ Conference and organisations of non-university HEIs, and HEI IQA officers). CYQAA consults HEIs about changes in its methodologies. The representatives of HEIs gave examples of modifications which they had proposed and had been taken

on board by the agency. They see themselves as CYQAA's partners in designing methodologies. The self-assessment to be conducted by HEIs as part of external evaluations has been recently redesigned on the initiative of experts and the Council (Meetings with the Council, Part I, and experts).

As explained by the CYQAA Council (Meeting, Part I), while the institutional and departmental evaluation standards are nearly identical, the processes differ in focus and depth (e.g. different bodies at each level; more thorough evaluation at departmental level; focus on facilities at institutional level). Some international experts suggest simplifying the programme evaluation standards to avoid overlap (see ESG 3.6). In discussions on CYQAA's methodologies, representatives of HEIs highlighted benefits from evaluations which were already clearly visible. A combination of programme and institutional evaluations and, in the future, audits is considered very useful as giving an overall picture of quality.

CYQAA and HEIs agree that EQA is currently geared towards control or compliance checking (see ESG 2.1). At the same time, all the stakeholders interviewed (CYQAA, representatives of HEIs, professional bodies and MOEC) see a change in culture and that a quality or QA culture is emerging after the first three years of CYQAA's activity. There has been a huge improvement in the quality of programmes in terms of their structure, contents, and teaching and learning methods; HEIs are developing key performance indicators; Internal Evaluation Committees at HEIs play an increasingly important role and regular meetings are held to review IQA mechanisms; action plans for improvement are in place.

### **Analysis**

For evaluations / accreditation reviews, the QAA Laws and CYQAA's mission taken jointly set a double aim of ensuring compliance with minimum requirements, as a condition for accreditation, and supporting quality enhancement. In the panel's view, CYQAA's procedures (ESG 2.3) and criteria (ESG 2.1) for evaluations are fit to serve this double purpose insofar as they provide evidence that may be used for both checking compliance with the requirements or controlling and guiding quality enhancement. This is also confirmed by some examples of improvements given by the stakeholders; more evidence of quality improvement could hardly be expected at this stage. While evaluations currently focus on compliance assurance as opposed to quality enhancement, this is understandable in the initial years of QA in Cyprus, as noted under ESG 2.1.

CYQAA's methodology for the assessment of conditions for CBHE provision by foreign HEIs, based on the recognition of other agencies' evaluations, is adequate for ensuring that programmes to be offered and qualifications awarded are not of a lower standard than in foreign HEIs' home countries.

The panel confirms that final outcomes of all processes are clearly defined, and improvements based on recommendations from evaluations / accreditation reviews and developments between the accreditation cycles are followed up by the agency. There is no arrangement for HEIs to show improvement as part of the assessment of conditions for the provision of CBHE by foreign HEIs, but this process is not aimed at quality enhancement. (For further comments, see ESG 2.3 and 2.5)

It would seem to the panel that all the data and documents that should be provided to CYQAA as part of evaluations / accreditation reviews and the related follow-up (combined with GIERS to be submitted) create a heavy burden for HEIs. This may be justified, however, by the need to ensure that basic conditions for quality education are in place (see ESG 2.1), and the interviews with representatives of HEIs show that benefits are perceived as outweighing costs. The panel agrees with international experts, though, that reviewing the evaluation standards to eliminate some overlap would be a good idea.

By predetermining various elements of CYQAA's procedures and IQA approaches for HEIs (see ESG 3.3 and 2.1), the QAA Laws limit to an extent the room for CYQAA to design its processes jointly with its stakeholders. It is clear, however, that, within these limits, the agency ensures genuine rather than

only token involvement of HEIs and experts in the development of its methodologies. Students contribute through their representative on the CYQAA Council. It seems too early to expect greater involvement of students, for example, through consultations with POFEN. The panel understands from its interview with students that POFEN sees its role in EQA mainly as putting forward candidates for the Council. As it learned from HEI IQA officers, students do not take yet full advantage of the opportunities to get engaged in IQA. (For further comments, see ESG 2.4) As details of the CBHE assessment methodology are predetermined by the law, there is no room for consultations and, given its specificity, they could hardly offer an added value.

#### **Panel commendation**

The panel commends CYQAA for ensuring, within the limits set by law, genuine involvement of higher education institutions in the development of its methodologies for external evaluations.

#### **Panel suggestions for further improvement**

CYQAA is encouraged to review its evaluation standards to eliminate any unnecessary overlap.

#### **Panel conclusion: Fully compliant**

### **ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES**

Standard:

External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include:

- a self-assessment or equivalent
- an external assessment normally including a site visit
- a report resulting from the external assessment
- a consistent follow-up

#### **Evidence**

CYQAA currently has one procedure for Institutional, departmental, and programme evaluations, and evaluations of joint programmes and CBHE provided by local HEIs, regardless of whether an initial or periodic evaluation is conducted. The procedure for periodic evaluations may be adjusted in the future. As predefined by the QAA Laws, it includes the appointment of an EEC (see ESG 2.4); the submission by an HEI of an application, including its self-assessment, which is forwarded to the EEC; a site visit conducted by the EEC; a report produced by the EEC which is sent by CYQAA to the HEI; a three-month period for the HEI to implement EEC recommendations and provide evidence for this to CYQAA to take an accreditation decision; an agency final report with the Council's accreditation decision (see ESG 2.5 and 2.6); and a follow-up. The same procedure is applied in a second evaluation, conducted in specific cases (see ESG 2.5). (QAA Laws; SAR; Meetings with the CYQAA Council, Heads of evaluated HEIs and HEI IQA officers).

Until recently, HEIs conducted a self-assessment according to the external evaluation standards, using a scale of 1 to 5 and substantiating their judgements. In July 2018, this was replaced with a SWOT analysis to be submitted by HEIs together with their applications. The scale did not provide sufficient evidence due to a 'mechanistic approach' taken by HEIs; the new approach aims to encourage reflection on strengths and weaknesses and support strategic planning. (SAR; Meeting with the Council, Part I) A typical provisional site visit agenda includes meetings with heads, academic and administrative staff and students; examination of staff records, exam papers and degree theses; and

a tour of facilities (SAR). As explained in the Addendum to the SAR, a site visit programme may include a meeting with social and business partners where this is considered necessary by the ECC or HEI concerned; the final decision is taken by the EEC Chair. For joint programmes, EECs have Skype meetings with partner HEIs abroad (Meeting with CYQAA staff).

In accordance with the QAA Laws, CYQAA may ascertain whether HEIs continue to meet its standards during the validity period of accreditation. As part of such a follow-up, CYQAA analyses semester reports (data on students, teaching staff, size of classes, student placement hosts, etc.) and reports on any changes which HEIs are required to submit; GIERs (first to be submitted in November 2018; see the section on QA in Cyprus); as well as information on programmes published by HEIs at the beginning of each semester and information from other sources (e.g. advertisements on programmes). This is done to ensure that all conditions to deliver a programme and adequate facilities (infrastructure, library, etc.) are still in place. Where any changes have occurred, they are assessed by the Council, with advice given by the EEC involved earlier in a given evaluation if specific academic expertise is required. If shortcomings or deviations from the standards are identified, CYQAA sends a letter requesting written clarifications, and a site visit or second evaluation may be undertaken. (Meetings with the CYQAA Council, Heads of evaluated HEIs and HEI IQA officers)

Pursuant to the QAA Laws and the General Prosecutor's decision, the procedure for the assessment of conditions for CBHE provided by foreign HEIs (conducted before a programme is launched) involves only a desk-based review by CYQAA staff, with no EEC appointed. Staff check the documentation submitted (see ESG 3.6). (QAA Laws; SAR; Addendum to the SAR). CYQAA staff consider that a site visit would be useful. Staff will collect data on ongoing programmes, but there are no further details, including possible periodicity, about such a follow-up. (Addendum to the SAR; Meeting with staff)

Between 2016 and 2018, CYQAA organised seminars and training sessions for HEIs on its methodologies. There are templates for applications to be submitted by HEIs (SAR, Annexes 3-5) and EEC reports (CYQAA website), and the Guidelines for the Members of External Evaluation Committees (SAR, Annex 8). The Guidelines describe the evaluation procedure and the role of EEC members and include a site visit template and general guidelines on reports (see ESG 2.6). EEC members also receive a briefing before a site visit. The national and international experts interviewed consider that the Guidelines and briefings are very clear, very good and helpful (for details, see ESG 2.4); there are no special guidelines for joint programme evaluations.

### **Analysis**

The panel confirms that the procedures for all processes are predefined and published on the CYQAA website. Information about the procedures, including the follow-up phase (where it is in place), for all processes could be presented more consistently, though; it is not easy to locate all the necessary information about procedures and related documents in various sections of the website. There are plans to improve the website, as the panel learned during the visit.

Overall, the procedure for evaluations / accreditation reviews follows the structure recommended under ESG 2.3. The stage where HEIs are expected to take action, based on external evaluation reports, and where agencies are expected to follow up their actions, is included before CYQAA takes an accreditation decision. As the panel learned from the Council, this approach was chosen to skip the phase of conditional accreditation and ensure that all EEC recommendations would be implemented as this is crucial at the current stage of development of QA in the country.

As a self-directed form of self-assessment, a SWOT analysis may encourage HEIs to take on greater responsibility for quality, and help to shift gradually the focus of external evaluations from control to support for quality improvement. Its usefulness in the context of external evaluation, which is now

mainly control-oriented, will depend on whether it focuses on the areas addressed by CYQAA's standards. As regards site visits, the panel believes it would be useful to include a meeting with social and business partners as a standard item of the agenda; as noted under ESG 2.1, more consideration would need to be given to external stakeholder involvement in IQA in general and in QA of programmes. Leaving the decision to include such a meeting to the EEC chair may also undermine, to some extent, consistency in conducting processes. Since CYQAA has integrated the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes into its process, it is positive that a site visit includes an online interview with the partner HEI(s). As noted under ESG 2.1, though, the external evaluation report examined by the panel does not reflect a consistent focus in the evaluation on aspects which are specific to joint programmes.

Clearly, the post-evaluation follow-up provides CYQAA with a wealth of information on developments at HEIs. In line with the QAA Laws, CYQAA focuses on ascertaining that HEIs continue to meet its standards. This makes the process more of an ongoing control-oriented external evaluation (ensuring, in a way, that accreditation is granted in the next cycle) than a follow-up supporting quality improvement. As the panel notes under ESG 2.1 and 2.2, the focus on control in external evaluation is understandable in the initial years of QA. However, to help HEIs take on greater responsibility for quality, CYQAA would need to expand the focus of the follow-up to embrace quality improvement too; it is not too early, in the panel's view, to do that in the ongoing evaluation cycle. Also, the follow-up is more of an established practice, where evidence from various sources is analysed at various points of time, rather than a clearly defined process presented in an integrated way on the CYQAA website (though elements of the process are referred to in the QAA Laws available on the website).

The interviews with representatives of HEIs indicate that evaluations are both useful (see ESG 2.1 and 2.2) and consistently conducted. Consistency is, evidently, helped by the templates and guidelines developed by CYQAA, and its training sessions for HEIs and briefing for EEC members. Judging from the feedback from experts and their contents, the guidelines and briefing are, overall, sufficient to ensure consistency in how EECs conduct evaluations. The report examined indicates that CYQAA should give more consideration to the specificity of joint programmes in its briefings (see ESG 2.1).

The assessment of conditions for CBHE provision by foreign HEIs does not follow the recommended stages, being limited to a desk-based review. Given its specificity, it is justified that it does not include a self-assessment stage and is conducted by CYQAA staff rather than a panel of external experts. However, the process would be more reliable if it included a site visit to verify the accuracy of documentary evidence, as suggested by CYQAA staff, and a follow-up to verify on a periodic basis whether a programme continues to meet the conditions for provision specified by law. Any change like this would require an amendment to the QAA Laws.

For related comments about CYQAA's autonomy in the implementation of processes, see ESG 3.3.

### **Panel recommendations**

CYQAA should (1) expand the focus of the follow-up stage in its evaluations to embrace not only control-oriented measures but also support for quality improvement; (2) give more consideration to the specificity of joint programmes in its briefings for experts to ensure full consistency in conducting evaluations; (3) take steps to include a site visit and a follow-up in the assessment of conditions for the provision of cross-border education by foreign HEIs.

### **Panel suggestions for further improvement**

CYQAA could (1) consider including a meeting with social and business partners as a standard item of the site visit agenda for evaluations to address more thoroughly external stakeholder involvement in

internal quality assurance; and (2) for ease of reference, present the information on procedures for all its processes, including a follow-up, on its website in a more integrated way. For a related suggestion on CYQAA's autonomy in the implementation of processes, see ESG 3.3.

**Panel conclusion: Substantially compliant**

**ESG 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS**

Standard:

External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).

**Evidence**

External experts are involved as EEC members in institutional, departmental, and programme evaluations, and evaluations of joint programmes and CBHE provided by local HEIs. There are five categories of EEC members: academic experts, including DL experts; student welfare experts; building and technological infrastructure experts; students-experts; and professional practitioners. The assessment of conditions for CBHE provision by foreign HEIs is conducted by CYQAA staff. (SAR)

Currently, CYQAA's register of experts includes 80 national and 629 international academic experts; 3 infrastructure experts; 2 student welfare experts; 398 students-experts; and 62 professional practitioners. International experts come from Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. In 2017, international experts represented 96% of all EEC members, with 48% coming from Greece and 48% from other countries. (SAR; Addendum to the SAR)

Academic experts are selected for the register through online research (websites of, mainly European, HEIs) and based on CVs submitted by candidates. The CYQAA Council applies the following criteria: teaching and research credentials; number of publications in internationally recognised journals; ResearchGate score; international rankings of home departments; university management and QA experience. Though this is not required by law, preference is given to academics holding the academic rank of Professor or Associate Professor. (SAR; Addendum to the SAR; Meeting with staff) A list of student welfare and infrastructure experts is provided by public universities and the Technical Chamber of Cyprus, and a list of professional experts by the professional associations representing the regulated professions.

Students are not yet sufficiently involved in IQA; there seems to be passive confidence among students in institutional mechanisms and lack of commitment (Meeting with HEI IQA officers). They devote much time to studying and few are familiar with CYQAA's activities (Meeting with POFEN and students-experts). Students-experts are put forward by public universities (SAR; Meetings with CYQAA staff and Heads of evaluated HEIs). Private HEIs would like to propose candidates for students-experts, as the panel learned from their representatives. The selection of students for lists provided to the agency is based on grades (Meeting with CYQAA staff). As explained by the students interviewed, criteria are not 'made explicit' to them by their HEIs; they are informed about being long-listed when appointed to an EEC. Students suggested that in addition to grades, which ensure that students with subject-area knowledge are selected, English and communication skills could be taken into account in selection; experience in IQA is not required, in their view, as they receive CYQAA's guidelines and briefing.

Pursuant to the QAA Laws, an EEC for an institutional evaluation is composed of at least three academic experts, incl. at least one from an overseas HEI who has extensive university management experience;

a student welfare expert; an infrastructure expert; and a student. For a departmental and programme evaluation, and evaluation of a joint programme and CBHE provided by local HEIs, an EEC consists of at least three academic experts, incl. at least one from an overseas HEI, specialising in the discipline concerned; a student; and a member of a professional association which grants licences to exercise a given profession where (a) programme(s) (in the department) concerned train(s) students for a regulated profession. Additionally, where a DL programme is offered, an EEC includes a DL expert.

EECs are appointed by the CYQAA Council who chooses experts from among those short-listed by staff. This is based on experts' profiles, with special consideration given to university management experience for institutional evaluations, and the principle of no-conflict-of-interest (SAR). HEIs may raise reasoned objections to the appointment of an expert. EEC members are required to sign the no-conflict-of-interest declaration (SAR, Annex 9) (see also ESG 3.3).

EEC members receive the Guidelines for EEC Members (SAR, Annex 8) and a briefing before a site visit. The briefing covers the legislative framework for QA; CYQAA's methodologies; the scoring to assess compliance with the standards; additional criteria for DL programmes; and any additional issues raised by experts. (SAR; Addendum to the SAR; Meeting with international experts) As the panel learned from academic and professional experts, all documents, including the Guidelines, are very detailed and experts know what to do if they study them carefully. International experts believe they have a good understanding of the national context. The students interviewed, too, consider the Guidelines and the briefing to be very helpful; some would like to have additional training, for example, on how to phrase questions for a site visit. For institutional evaluations in the coming years (only six conducted until now), CYQAA intends to establish sub-committees to assess specific aspects (e.g. infrastructure); as highly qualified experts will be selected, they will not need any specific training beyond what is currently discussed in briefings (Final clarification meeting with CYQAA Council members).

The Chair of an EEC is appointed by the Council President, based on academic seniority and expertise. All EEC members contribute to an external evaluation report under the Chair's guidance and take collective responsibility for the report. (SAR; Addendum to the SAR; Meetings with national and international experts and students-experts). The academic experts and students-experts interviewed agree that students are treated as equal ECC members. As explained by students, the extent to which they contribute to an EEC's work depends on an individual student and how they are encouraged to contribute. Most focus on areas such as student welfare, library and learning facilities, as they do not feel competent to assess a curriculum or teaching. Professional practitioners look at how graduates will be prepared to exercise a profession and the relevance of programmes to what is needed at a workplace (Meeting with national experts).

In the 2018 survey among HEIs (see ESG 3.6), the respondents commended CYQAA for involving international experts not only from Greece but also from other European countries. Some pointed out that the procedure and criteria for the appointment of EEC members were not entirely clear; and that EEC members could have better knowledge of higher education in Cyprus. The SAR acknowledges that the appointment procedure should be more transparent; the profiles of experts should be published on the website at the end of an evaluation cycle as a single publication for all evaluations (in addition to the names of EEC members listed in each evaluation report). The Heads of evaluated HEIs and HEI IQA officers interviewed consider that, except for very few, EECs are very good or excellent, have all the necessary expertise and provide very helpful and constructive feedback.

### **Analysis**

CYQAA has a big pool of experts to choose from for its evaluations, and very extensive involvement of international experts is particularly valuable as it brings truly diverse inputs that HEIs may benefit from

and enhances transparency of the processes in the small academic community in Cyprus. It is also a good practice that HEIs can make reasoned objections concerning the composition of EECs. Further, there is evidence (see ESG 3.3 and 3.6) that the declaration signed by experts effectively prevents a possible conflict of interest.

The selection criteria for academic experts are clearly defined and set the bar high, so those included in the pool can indeed be expected to have all the necessary expertise; this is confirmed by the positive feedback from representatives of HEIs. Students are competent to do their job insofar as they limit their contribution to the areas they are well familiar with (for further comments, see below). Based on the discussions with their representatives, professional bodies select practitioners who provide useful inputs on how students can be better trained for a regulated profession. There is a transparent arrangement for the appointment of EECs, with a short list made by staff and decisions taken collectively by the Council rather than by its individual members.

The procedure and criteria for the selection of all categories of experts for the pool should be published, and the procedure for the selection of students more transparent, with criteria explicitly defined and communicated to students. The experience gained by CYQAA evaluation coordinators and students-experts could be used to define any additional criteria, other than grades, that would help maximise benefits from student involvement. Experience in IQA could also be taken into account when students are more extensively engaged. Ideally, the selection process could also be more inclusive, with students recruited from all types of HEIs rather than only public universities; if non-university HEIs have a longer way to go to meet quality standards, expertise in EQA gained by their students would help to develop their emerging IQA systems.

The discussions with evaluated HEIs and all groups of experts indicate that the Guidelines and the briefing provided by CYQAA are, overall, sufficient for EECs to know what they are expected to do and how, while taking into account the specific national context. In the panel's view, additional guidelines on scoring and joint programme evaluation would be needed – see ESG 2.3 and 2.5. As regards institutional evaluations in the coming years, CYQAA seems to rely very much on individual expertise. The panel believes it could be useful to provide experts with more detailed guidelines on what may be considered a good practice and what common shortcomings at HEIs should be given particular attention (this can be based on findings from GIERS (see QA in Cyprus)). Although it is a good practice to provide training to experts on a regular basis, this does not seem to be practicable for CYQAA, even if training is delivered online, considering the number of international experts involved.

As the relevance of programmes to employers' needs and graduate employability are important in all fields of study, it would be desirable to involve practitioners in all programme evaluations, not only those where students are trained for regulated professions (currently, 83 in Cyprus; a list provided by CYQAA), though this is currently not allowed by the QAA Laws. Ideally, representatives of social and business partners would also contribute to institutional evaluations. This would help EECs to address thoroughly ESG 1.1, 1.2., 1.3 and 1.9 from all relevant – academic, student, and professional – perspectives (see also the related comments under ESG 2.1).

It is, evidently, positive that all groups of experts feel that they participate on an equal footing. There is room, though, for a more substantial role of students in evaluations. It is now limited to few issues, which is a quite common issue in the newly established QA systems. If provided with additional and more in-depth training, they both could and should contribute to the areas such as student involvement in QA (ESG 1.1, 1.2, 1.9); SCL (ESG 1.3); arrangements for student admission, progression, recognition and certification (ESG 1.4); learning resources and student support (ESG 1.6), understood more broadly than facilities and welfare which students now focus on; and information on programmes published by HEIs (ESG 1.8). Based on the more in-depth training, CYQAA could define

then more clearly the role of students in evaluations so that it does not depend on the individual student and EEC.

Though this extends beyond ESG 2.4, the panel believes that there is also room for a more active role of POFEN (which puts forward candidates for the CYQAA Council student member) in promoting student involvement in EQA (as well as IQA) and helping students gain expertise which they need to engage in, and contribute to, QA as equal partners. The European Students' Union (ESU) could be a useful link for POFEN as it publishes studies on students' perspective on QA and assists in training students.

Finally, while the assessment of conditions for the provision of CBHE by foreign HEIs is conducted by CYQAA staff, this is fully justified as the process does not require academic or other specific expertise. As noted under ESG 3.6, the evidence collected indicates that staff are well-prepared to do the job.

### **Panel commendations**

The panel commends CYQAA for establishing a truly multinational pool of experts and ensuring their very extensive involvement in its evaluations, which maximises benefits for institutions and increases the independence of processes.

### **Panel recommendations**

CYQAA should (1) publish the selection procedure and criteria for all categories of experts on its website; and (2) provide additional training to students to prepare them to contribute to all relevant evaluation areas, including student involvement in internal quality assurance and student-centred learning. See also the related recommendations under ESG 2.3 and 2.6.

### **Panel suggestions for further improvement**

CYQAA could consider (1) developing more detailed guidelines on institutional evaluations for experts to draw their attention to possible good practices and common shortcomings that may be identified at institutions; (2) taking steps to amend the legislation so that practitioners can be involved in evaluations of all programmes rather than only those for regulated professions; (3) refining the selection criteria for students-experts to include the knowledge of internal quality assurance, communication and English language skills and motivation in addition to academic grades; (4) recruiting students-experts from all types of institutions to make the selection process more inclusive and enhance the expertise in quality assurance available in non-university institutions; (5) taking steps to encourage the involvement of the Pancyprian Federation of Student Unions in promoting student engagement in external quality assurance, recruiting and training students-experts; (6) reaching out to, and engaging more actively in collaboration with, like-minded organisation which have more extensive experience in student involvement in quality assurance.

### **Panel conclusion: Substantially compliant**

## **ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES**

Standard:

Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.

## **Evidence**

Institutional, departmental, and programme evaluations, and evaluations of joint programmes and of CBHE provided by local HEIs lead to one of the three outcomes: accreditation, rejection or a second evaluation. A second evaluation is conducted when the evidence collected is insufficient; the shortcomings identified are neither insignificant enough for a positive decision, nor significant enough for a negative decision; or issues are addressed by the HEI's response to an EEC report, but the Council needs final approval from an EEC confirming compliance with the standards. (QAA Laws; SAR; Addendum). An assessment of conditions for CBHE provision by foreign HEIs ends with approval or rejection of an application. In the latter case, CYQAA informs the applicant HEI in Cyprus that additional documentation verified by the foreign institution should be provided; an application is approved when all required documents are submitted (Addendum to the SAR).

Pursuant to the QAA Laws, CYQAA's decisions should be based on the external evaluation criteria established by the agency and published by the Minister of Education and Culture in the Official Gazette and by the agency on its website.

Decision in all EQA processes are taken by the CYQAA Council. The Council examines an EEC report, based on the evaluation standards, the HEI's response to the report and the evidence from the HEI demonstrating that it has implemented recommendations made in the EEC report (for the first five processes) or a report / document prepared by CYQAA staff (for the assessment of conditions for CBHE provision by foreign HEIs). (SAR; Meetings with the Council and international experts) Decisions are taken by majority vote, with the quorum defined in the QAA Laws.

The following arrangements are considered by CYQAA as ensuring consistency in how EEC members apply the criteria and give scores in their reports: criteria sent one month before a site visit; briefing for an EEC which covers the scoring system; an EEC working collectively towards consistent application of the criteria; the requirement that an EEC should provide supporting evidence to justify the grades given; and on-going support from the CYQAA evaluation coordinator (SAR). Grades to be given by experts were redefined after an initial period to ensure greater consistency (Addendum to the SAR). The experts interviewed consider the scoring system to be, overall, clear, though they arrive at a common understanding more as a result of discussions during a site visit than the briefing; in several cases, they asked the agency for further guidelines during a visit. As some suggest, the scoring could be reduced to four grades (poor, satisfactory, very good, and excellent).

As explained in the SAR and the panel's discussion with the Council (Part II) about consistency in decision-making, Council members have gradually developed a common understanding of the evaluation standards and minutes are taken in meetings.

## **Analysis**

The panel confirms that the standards for the main evaluation processes and the 'criteria' or conditions assessed for the provision of CBHE by foreign HEIs are clear and published on the CYQAA website. Like for procedures (see ESG 2.3), though, the information is not very easy to locate (the criteria for the main processes in the application templates, and the conditions for CBHE provision by foreign HEIs in the QAA Laws, even if there are clear references to the Laws in other sections of the website). The website is to be improved soon, as mentioned earlier.

On the one hand, while the Guidelines for EEC members clearly state that judgements should be substantiated by evidence and the scoring system is explained during the briefing, the EEC reports examined by the panel vary in terms of the level of detail in evidence, depth of analysis and consistency in scoring. In some reports, there is no or little evidence or no or generic comment to

substantiate grades for some criteria, and / or while the highest grade is given, recommendations are made about important issues (e.g. student assessment methodology or flexible study options). Thus, more detailed and written guidelines on scoring would be needed. (For further comments, see ESG 2.6.) On the other hand, a second evaluation is conducted where evidence is insufficient for the Council to take a decision; this was the case with at least some of 60 positive accreditation decisions taken after a second evaluation in 2017 (SAR) and, as the panel learned from HEI IQA officers, where a report was poor, a second evaluation was indeed conducted. Furthermore, inconsistency in experts' scoring, though an issue in itself, does not seem to have a significant impact on the Council's decisions as recommendations made in an EEC report should, in any case, be implemented by an HEI before a decision is taken (see ESG 2.3). The CBHE assessment reports drafted by staff for the Council that the panel read consistently follow the 'criteria' and the final 'judgment' / requests for additional documents are substantiated.

Consistency in decision-making by the Council is, clearly, helped by the requirement for HEIs to implement recommendations made in EEC reports and provide evidence for this before the Council takes an accreditation decision, the clearly defined cases where a second evaluation is conducted, and collective decision-making. The panel found no indication in its discussions with representatives of HEIs that decisions were not taken consistently. Though this is not a significant issue, what would need to be fully clarified, is whether literally all, not only major but also (very) minor, recommendations should be fully implemented for a positive decision.

For full transparency, it would also be a good idea to publish the decision-making procedure, including cases where a second evaluation is conducted, on the CYQAA website, even though the procedure is outlined in the QAA Laws which are available there and HEIs are fully familiar with it.

#### **Panel recommendations**

CYQAA should (1) develop more detailed and written guidelines for experts to ensure greater consistency in scoring; (2) state more explicitly in its decision-making procedure whether accreditation can be granted in any case where an HEI has not fully implemented a minor recommendation made in an external evaluation report. For a related recommendation on reporting, see ESG 2.6.

#### **Panel suggestions for further improvement**

CYQAA could publish information on its criteria and decision-making procedure, including cases where a second evaluation is conducted, in an integrated way and in an easily located section of its website.

#### **Panel conclusion: Substantially compliant**

### **ESG 2.6 REPORTING**

Standard:

Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.

#### **Evidence**

Institutional, departmental, and programme evaluations and evaluations of joint programmes and CBHE provided by local HEIs end with a report produced by an EEC and the agency's final report. EEC reports are based on templates. The template includes general information about the process (legal basis, procedure, site visit details, EEC members, and documents examined); findings about key aspects,

conclusions, including good practices and areas for improvement, and suggestions / recommendations); scores by standard with space for substantiating comments; and final remarks and suggestions / recommendations. Aside from the details about the legal basis and the procedure, the agency's final report contains the Council's decision and the validity period of accreditation; a statement that CYQAA may verify whether the HEI continues to comply with the standards during the accreditation validity period; and a statement about the right to lodge an appeal where accreditation is refused. (SAR; templates, EEC reports and agency reports provided by CYQAA and available on its website)

Pursuant to the QAA Laws, an EEC report should be drafted jointly by all members, with the Chair having a coordinating role and all members contributing. The Guidelines for EEC members (SAR, Annex 8) address the content and style of reports; for example, both strengths and weaknesses to be considered; grades to be substantiated; recommendations to be included; comments to be clear and specific. After the site visit, as a rule, an EEC has one day to draft its report; there are cases where an EEC has four programmes to assess and should write four reports in three days, which leaves less than one day for each report. (SAR; Meetings with experts). The report is sent to the HEI concerned for feedback, including comments on possible factual errors and misconceptions; errors are corrected where necessary. (SAR; Addendum to the SAR; Meeting with Heads of evaluated HEIs) When an HEI provides evidence on how it has implemented recommendations (see ESG 2.3) for the Council to take an accreditation decision, no changes are made in the EEC report and no appendix is prepared (Final clarification meeting with Council members).

Pursuant to the QAA Laws, EEC reports and the agency's final reports should be published on its website and be readily accessible to stakeholders and the public. As explained in the Addendum to the SAR, reports are uploaded onto the website within one month of the Council decision.

As the panel learned from experts, it is quite tough to draft a report in one day, even more so in problematic cases when details should be reported and some rethinking is required. They believe, however, that the tough schedule does not have impact on the quality of reports. The Heads of Evaluated HEIs and HEI IQA officers interviewed consider that EEC reports are clear, comments are very relevant, and recommendations provide a clear roadmap for improvements to be made.

The assessment of conditions for CBHE provision by foreign HEIs ends with a document which states (1) that an assessment has been conducted in accordance with the QAA Laws, and confirming that all conditions specified in the Laws are fulfilled and that the foreign HEI concerned is authorised to award the qualification which a given programme leads to; and that the programme is required to fulfil the evaluation criteria published on CYQAA's website which are based on the ESG; or (2) what additional information and / or documents should be provided. (Addendum to the SAR; examples examined).

### **Analysis**

The panel confirms that the EEC report template and the six external evaluation reports examined cover the elements recommended under ESG 2.6. All of the reports are clear and easy to read, and recommendations clearly show what follow-up action should be taken by HEIs. It is also a good practice that reports are sent to HEIs to identify possible factual errors and misconceptions.

However, as noted under ESG 2.1, external evaluation reports give more consideration to whether the requirements are met or required mechanisms are in place than to the effectiveness of IQA. As noted under 2.3 and 2.5, their quality varies in terms of evidence provided, depth of analysis and consistency. Comments in some reports are too generic (e.g. an excellent system for programme management is in place; the QA of the programme is appropriate; the quality management and connection with the labour market and society were deemed to be appropriate). All this makes them much less useful for the HEIs concerned and other stakeholders (and for CYQAA itself as a source of material for thematic

analyses). This is not a problem of the Guidelines for experts which clearly state that scores should be substantiated and comments should be specific. Rather, as signalled under ESG 3.6, CYQAA would need a quality-check mechanism for reports. Some agencies appoint members of a body like the Council or staff to check all incoming draft reports in terms of evidence provided to substantiate comments and consistency between scores and comments. With such a mechanism in place, CYQAA could also avoid some second evaluations (see ESG 2.5) which extend the duration of the entire evaluation process and put an additional strain on its human resources. Further, the panel believes that the average quality of reports would improve if EECs had more time than one day for drafting them.

EEC reports include an additional section for PhD and DL programmes, based on the additional standards for these types of programmes. For joint programmes, CYQAA additionally applies a number of its own standards and those defined in the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. There is no section for comments addressing these standards in the template and it would not be easy to comment on all of them under the standards for all programmes; as noted under ESG 2.1 and 2.3, the additional aspects specific to joint programmes are not fully addressed in the report examined.

HEIs should implement recommendations made in EEC reports and provide evidence for this before CYQAA takes an accreditation decision, but the EEC report is published in its original version and there is no annex for an EEC to comment on the extent to which recommendations have been implemented (though the agency's final report confirms that the accreditation standards have been met). The panel agrees with the national experts that such an annex would need to be added so that the documents published cover the entire evaluation process.

The panel confirms that CYQAA publishes EEC reports together with the agency's final reports which include an accreditation decision and its validity period. However, only some institutional and programme evaluation reports were available on the CYQA website at the time of drafting this review report. All EEC reports, including those leading to refusal of accreditation, and the agency's final reports should be published, at least on the Greek-language website.

Considering the specificity of the assessment of conditions for the provision of CBHE by foreign HEIs, the document issued by CYQAA upon completion of the process could not be expected to follow the structure recommended under this ESG. The two CYQAA documents examined by the panel clearly state what decision has been taken and, where the application is not approved, what kind of information and documents should be provided. All three programmes for which CYQAA has issued a positive decision are listed in the Franchised Programmes section of the website. CYQAA's decisions are not published. However, the panel does not consider this to be an issue as the explanatory note there clearly states that the HEIs concerned have submitted all the necessary documents and the agency has verified that all of the conditions specified in the QAA Laws have been fulfilled.

### **Panel recommendations**

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

## Panel suggestions

CYQAA could consider extending the time limit for External Evaluation Committees to draft their external evaluation reports.

## Panel conclusion: Partially compliant

### ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

Standard:

Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.

#### Evidence

CYQAA has in place a process for considering objections. It is for HEIs that are dissatisfied with CYQAA's decision because of incorrect conduct of a process and interpretation / synthesis of evidence by an EEC, or because of disagreement with its conclusions, which is the most common reason (SAR; Meeting with the CYQAA Council, Part II). Pursuant to the QAA Laws, within one month of the receipt of the agency's final report, an HEI may lodge a reasoned objection requesting reconsideration of the report. Within two months, CYQAA takes a decision on whether reconsideration is justified and communicates it to the HEI and the Minister of Education and Culture. Where it finds the objection justified, it examines the evidence available in the evaluation file and the grounds set out in the objection. The decision taken is final.

HEIs' right to lodge an objection is explicitly referred to in the QAA Laws published on CYQAA's website. Where accreditation is refused, the agency's final report includes a statement about the HEI's right to appeal against the decision and the timeframe for the process (final reports on the website; Meetings with the CYQAA Council, Part II, and Heads of evaluated HEIs). In total, 26 objections concerning evaluations / accreditation reviews were filed until the time of the site visit; eight led to a positive accreditation decision, including three after a second evaluation (Addendum to the SAR).

Decisions are taken by the CYQAA Council. In cases which do not require specific academic expertise (e.g. Study Guides produced by an HEI after CYQAA's accreditation decision), objections are handled only by the Council itself; where such expertise is necessary (e.g. changes in a medical programme), the Council seeks advice from the EEC which conducted a given evaluation. Where evidence is not sufficient or inconclusive, or the Council needs formal approval from experts, a second evaluation (ESG 2.5) is conducted by the same EEC. (SAR; Meetings with the CYQAA Council, Part II, and Heads of evaluated HEIs). For the representatives of HEIs interviewed, the procedure is clear and ensures efficiency and transparency. The agency has drafted amendments to the QAA Laws to be considered by the House of Representatives by the beginning of 2019. As proposed, CYQAA would establish a register of national and international experts and appoint a three-member ad-hoc committee for each objection filed; each member would provide their input separately, based on the documents available, and a final decision would be taken by the Council. (Addendum to the SAR; List of amendments).

HEIs can complain about, for example, improper conduct or inadequate expertise of EEC members or CYQAA evaluation coordinators in their response to the EEC report, a meeting with the coordinator at the end of a site visit or in various formal and informal meetings with the CYQAA Council. Where an HEI makes a formal or informal complaint, the Council 'cross-checks' it with the CYQAA coordinator and takes a decision. Two or three experts have been struck from the pool as a result of complaints. (Meetings with the CYQAA Council and staff, and representatives of HEIs)

## **Analysis**

The panel confirms that CYQAA has in place a formal and clearly defined process for HEIs to appeal against its accreditation decisions and HEIs have all the necessary information where they wish to do so. While HEIs are also fully satisfied with the current arrangements, the panel agrees with CYQAA that the process, as predefined by the QAA Laws, is not yet fully transparent since, basically, it involves the same individuals as the original evaluation. (The issue would be fully addressed by the amendment to the Laws drafted by CYQAA.) At the same time, second evaluations conducted as part of handling objections and the roughly one-third of the cases considered so far that have led to a positive accreditation decision are indicative of the Council's openness, impartiality and professionalism in conducting the process. In its discussions with representatives of HEIs, the panel found no evidence of inconsistency in how the Council considers objections.

As part of an assessment of conditions for CBHE provision by foreign HEIs, HEIs are requested by CYQAA during the process to provide any information or documents required which may be missing. CYQAA only checks compliance with clearly defined formal conditions, so an outcome of the process is hardly disputable. Nonetheless, since it should be possible for HEIs to appeal against any formal decision of an agency, this would need to be reflected in CYQAA's assessment procedure (for example, information about the right to appeal included in the document communicating its final negative decision).

It is evident that various avenues are open to HEIs which may wish to make a complaint when they are dissatisfied with how a process was conducted or those involved in it. There is also an established practice for handling complaints within CYQAA. As noted under ESG 3.6, this seems to work well insofar as some experts have been struck from the pool and the various avenues for raising issues are appreciated by HEIs. At the same time, as in the case of feedback collection (ESG 3.6), there is a tendency to rely mainly on informal communication, and the arrangements in place do not add up yet to a clearly defined and formally adopted procedure for filing and considering complaints.

### **Panel recommendations**

CYQAA should (1) establish a separate committee of experts for considering appeals against its accreditation decisions to ensure full transparency (as proposed in the amendments to the legislation already drafted); (2) include the possibility of appealing against its decisions in the procedure for the assessment of conditions for the provision of cross-border education by foreign HEIs; and (3) integrate current practices into a clearly defined complaints procedure.

### **Panel conclusion: Substantially compliant**

# ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

## PROCEDURE FOR AUDITS TO BE PUT IN PLACE

The Background of the Review section explains that the panel is unable to assess ESG compliance of Audit (one of CYQAA's seven activities covered by the ToRs for the review) as at the time of the site visit the process was not yet clearly defined in terms of its scope and methodology. As the panel learned from the CYQAA Council and staff, the agency intends to start analysing GIERS from HEIs, which provide the basis for audits, soon after they are submitted in November 2018. Thus, audits will be fully in place when the ENQA Board considers CYQAA's application for membership in early 2019. CYQAA could be requested by the ENQA Board to submit an update document providing details about the audit process.

At this stage, the panel notes, however, that the possible methodology for audits discussed by CYQAA during the panel's visit carry a risk of failing to comply with ESG 2.3 and 2.4. Audits will be conducted either by CYQAA Council members or by CYQAA staff, with no involvement of external experts, whereas experts are at the core of EQA under ESG 2.3 and 2.4, with an external assessment, including a site visit, to be carried out and a report to be written by a group of external experts. It would be important for CYQAA to consider this, in particular, because audits will provide not only the material for system-wide analyses but also the basis for CYQAA's further action (e.g. inspections / site visits in problematic cases) and, thus, their outcomes will have consequences for individual HEIs. CYQAA would still have time to redesign its methodology for audits when it receives the panel's draft report for a factual accuracy check (beginning of December 2018 at the latest). The panel is aware that adopting a methodology based on expert involvement may require an amendment to the legislation which now refers to experts only in the context of external evaluations / accreditation reviews.

## PROSPECTIVE AMENDMENT TO THE NATIONAL LEGISLATION CONCERNING CYQAA'S APPEALS PROCEDURE

CYQAA's current appeals procedure (ESG 2.7) is not yet fully transparent. The agency has drafted an amendment to the national legislation which, in the panel's view, would address the issue. As the panel learned from the CYQAA Council, the proposed amendment is expected to be approved by the House of Representatives in early 2019. CYQAA could be requested by the ENQA Board to submit an update document providing details about the appeals procedure.

# CONCLUSION

## SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS

The panel commends CYQAA for:

- conducting its activities in a way which has inspired trust in the newly established external quality assurance system and promoted the value of quality among higher education institutions (ESG 3.1);
- managing its scarce resources in the initial years in a way which enabled it to combine core external quality assurance activities with some capacity development activities for itself and higher education institutions (ESG 3.5);
- ensuring, within the limits set by law, genuine involvement of higher education institutions in the development of its methodologies for external evaluations (ESG 2.2);
- establishing a truly multinational pool of experts and ensuring their extensive involvement in evaluations, which maximises benefits for institutions and increases the independence of processes (ESG 2.4).

## OVERVIEW OF JUDGEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the documentary and oral evidence considered by it, the review panel is satisfied that, in the performance of its functions, CYQAA is, overall, in substantial compliance with the ESG. The ESG where CYQAA has achieved full compliance are: 3.2, 3.5, 3.7 and 2.2. The panel has found CYQAA to be substantially compliant with ESG 3.1, 3.3, 3.6, 2.1, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5 and 2.7; partially compliant with ESG 2.6; and non-compliant with ESG 3.4. The Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews state that the overall judgement on compliance does not result from a mathematical calculation, but a case of non-compliance would normally lead to a judgement that the agency is not substantially compliant with the ESG overall. In its overall conclusion, the panel takes into account that that ESG 3.4 (Thematic analysis) is exceptional in that, unlike the other ESG, it refers to the research function of an agency rather than its core external quality assurance activities and non-compliance with this ESG has no impact on how CYQAA operates as an institution and conducts its core activities or on the extent to which CYQAA complies with the other ESG. Considering the heterogeneous nature of higher education in Cyprus at the time of the establishment of the agency (universities and non-university HEIs, public and private HEIs, cross-border higher education), CYQAA has been extremely successful in enforcing common rules and standards across HEIs. These rules and standards are now accepted by all stakeholders and the agency is recognised by all as being in charge of QA in Cyprus and doing its job in an autonomous and competent way.

The agency is recommended to take appropriate action, so far as it is empowered to do so, to achieve full compliance with these standards at the earliest opportunity.

The panel recommends that CYQAA:

- revise its mission statement to incorporate its compliance-assurance aim alongside that of supporting quality improvement in higher education; and devise a detailed two-year activity plan to guide effectively its activities towards the aims set (ESG 3.1);
- discuss with its stakeholders how the procedure for the appointment and dismissal of the Council can be amended so that it is not perceived as providing space for interference of the national

authorities; be fully separated from the Ministry of Education and Culture in organisational terms, including the staff recruitment process and financial services (ESG 3.3);

- introduce the practice of analysing systematically the material collected in its external quality assurance activities and publishing regularly its findings to provide inputs to national policies, support institutions in the development of internal quality assurance and aid its own reflection on its external quality assurance processes (ESG 3.4);
- rely increasingly on formal rather than informal mechanisms for feedback collection and improve its current mechanism for collecting feedback after each evaluation (a response submitted by each institution) so that institutions are explicitly requested to provide feedback and do so in a structured way (ESG 3.6);
- incorporate into its standards the few aspects of Part 1 of the ESG, including external stakeholder involvement, which are currently not or not explicitly addressed; and gradually shift the focus in its processes after the first accreditation cycle from controlling institutions to supporting them in carrying their responsibility for quality and in quality improvement, with due consideration to be given to the effectiveness of internal quality assurance (ESG 2.1);
- expand the focus of the follow-up stage in its evaluations to embrace not only control-oriented measures but also support for quality improvement; give more consideration to the specificity of joint programmes in its briefings for experts to ensure full consistency in conducting evaluations; and take steps to include a site visit and a follow-up in the assessment of conditions for the provision of cross-border education by foreign HEIs (ESG 2.3);
- publish the selection procedure and criteria for all categories of experts on its website; provide additional training to students to prepare them to contribute to all relevant evaluation areas, including student involvement in internal quality assurance and student-centred learning (ESG 2.4);
- develop more detailed and written guidelines for experts to ensure greater consistency in scoring; state more explicitly in its decision-making procedure whether accreditation can be granted in any case where an HEI has not fully implemented a minor recommendation made in an external evaluation report (ESG 2.5);
- put in place a mechanism to ensure that all external evaluation reports are of comparably high quality in terms of evidence to substantiate scores, comments being specific and consistency between scores and comments, and give due consideration to the effectiveness of internal quality assurance; provide space in the evaluation report template to address the specificity of joint programmes; introduce an annex to an external evaluation report for experts to comment on the implementation of recommendations by institutions, and to be published together with a report; and publish all reports, including those leading to refusal of accreditation, in addition to those currently available on its website (ESG 2.6);
- establish a separate committee of experts for considering appeals against its accreditation decisions to ensure full transparency (as proposed in the amendments to the legislation already drafted); include the possibility of appealing against its decisions in the procedure for the assessment of conditions for the provision of cross-border education by foreign HEIs; and integrate current practices into a clearly defined complaints procedure (ESG 2.7).

The panel has also made some suggestions for further improvement under the relevant ESG.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The panel would like to highlight a few more general issues related to CYQAA's further development which it may wish to reflect on and discuss with its stakeholders in the coming years. Some of them, including those which extend beyond strictly interpreted ESG, have been signalled in the previous sections.

The QAA Laws, as noted under ESG 3.3, 2.1 and 2.3, leave quite limited autonomy to CYQAA in designing its EQA processes, and to HEIs in developing their IQA approaches. By the time the first programme and institutional accreditation cycles are completed (end of 2020), the agency will have gained quite extensive experience in conducting its processes and will see where HEIs are in terms of embedding IQA and building a quality culture. A thematic analysis recommended under ESG 3.4 would provide CYQAA with a good overview of trends and developments. Based on this, CYQAA may consider initiating a debate with its stakeholders on whether the legislation could be amended towards greater autonomy to reflect the growing maturity of the agency and the progress made by HEIs.

CYQAA acknowledges that its EQA processes are now control-oriented but aims to help HEIs develop their self-regulation capacity so that its processes may be refocused towards quality improvement in the future; the current phase is seen as laying the groundwork for this. The transition can begin with expanding the focus of the follow-up stage to include support for HEIs in quality improvement (ESG 2.3). As HEIs should meet stringent requirements in the ongoing first evaluation cycle, CYQAA may consider introducing more flexible arrangements, focusing less on control and more on quality improvement, in evaluations of existing HEIs and programmes in the next cycle, while keeping the focus on control, if necessary, in evaluations of new ones. It could also consider a more individualised approach where evaluations are less control- and more improvement-oriented for HEIs or programmes which demonstrate the effectiveness of IQA, and others continue to undergo evaluations as they are designed now.

As the panel learned in its interviews, students are not yet involved in EQA and IQA as extensively as it could be expected from a key stakeholder, and makes some recommendations for CYQAA in the context of ESG 2.4. Since the issue of student involvement in QA extends far beyond ESG 2.4 and it would be difficult to maximise their involvement in EQA without their engagement in IQA, CYQAA could consider initiating some 'student empowerment' actions such as seminars on QA jointly with POFEN and HEIs (Internal Quality Committees). In this way, it would also carry forward the aim of supporting HEIs in quality improvement defined in its mission statement. As suggested under ESG 2.4, POFEN could be encouraged to get engaged in recruiting and assisting in the training for students-experts.

It is clear to the panel that CYQAA is a learning organisation. It relies very much on its external experts and, as a new agency, learns from their inputs. As part of its capacity building, it may also consider how it can draw more extensively on the experience of other QA agencies, for example, through study visits to those which conduct similar processes (such as institutional evaluations) or seminars addressing specific evaluation issues organised in Cyprus; students working for other agencies or active in ESU could help train CYQAA's students-experts in, for example, how to look at areas such as SCL or learning support which are not specific to the evaluation methodology of a given agency.

Finally, it was not always easy for the panel to piece together information on CYQAA's methodologies (e.g. audits; the stage when HEIs implement EEC recommendations before CYQAA takes an accreditation decision; follow-up for evaluations) as some of their parts are regulated in various documents and other are an established practice. When the concept of audits takes a definite shape, CYQAA could look at all its processes and, further to the suggestions under ESG 2.3, 2.5 and 2.7, describe all related procedures in an integrated way and publish the information on its website.

# ANNEXES

## ANNEX 1: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

ARRIVAL DAY: 01.10.2018				
16.00-17.00 17.00-19.00	Meeting with the CYQAA resource person to discuss the national context Review panel preparatory meeting.	Erato Ioannou – CYQAA Administrative Officer		
DAY 1: 02.10.2018				
TIMING	TOPIC	PERSONS FOR INTERVIEW	ISSUES TO BE DISCUSSED	LEAD PANEL MEMBER
8.30--9.00	Arrival to the agency. Review panel private meeting			
9.00-10.00	Meeting with the Chair of the CYQAA Council	Prof. Mary Koutselini, Chair of the CYQAA Council	Strategic goals and activity planning (ESG 3.1); Independence (ESG 3.3); Funding and human resources (ESG 3.5); Research capacity and thematic analyses (3.4)	
10.00-10.05	Review panel break			
10.05-10.50	Meeting with the team responsible for the self-assessment report	Prof. Andreas Orphanides Member of the CYQAA Council – Head of the Committee Prof. Mary Koutselini, Chair of the CYQAA Council – Member of the Committee Prof. Constantinos Christou, Vice-Chair of the CYQAA Council – Member of the Committee Prof. George Demosthenous Member of the CYQAA Council – member of the Committee Erato Ioannou, CYQAA Administrative Officer	Preparation for the external review	
10.50-10.55	Review panel break			
10.55-11.55	Meeting with the CYQAA Council, Part I	Professor Constantinos Christou, Vice-Chairperson of CYQAA Council Professor Diofantos Hadjimitsis, Member of CYQAA Council	External quality assurance processes and methodologies: internal quality assurance in CYQAA processes (ESG 2.1); process design and implementation / procedures	

		Professor George Demosthenous, Member of CYQAA Council Professor Andreas Orphanides, Member of CYQAA Council Mrs. Aimilia Pasi (Lawyer) Representative of the Cyprus Bar Association, Member of CYQAA Council	(ESG 2.2 and 2.3); external evaluation experts (ESG 2.4); and reports (ESG 2.6).	
11.55-12.00	Review panel break			
12.00-13.00	Meeting with the CYQAA Council, Part II	Professor Mary Koutselini, Chairperson of CYQAA Council Professor George Chirstophides, Member of CYQAA Council Mr. George Karas (Civil Engineer) Representative of The Cyprus Scientific and Technical Chamber (E.T.E.K.), Member of CYQAA Council Professor Andreas Karamanos, Member of CYQAA Council Mr. Marios Mouyis Member of CYQAA Council (student representative) Michalis Katsouris – Former member of CYQAA Council – Student representative	CYQAA independence (ESG 3.3). External quality assurance decision-making: criteria for outcomes (ESG 2.5), and complaints and appeals (ESG 2.7). Recognition of evaluation / accreditation decisions taken by other QA agencies	
13.00-13.30	Discussion among panel members			
13.30-14.30	Lunch			
14.30-15.30	Meeting with CYQAA staff (Education and Administrative Officers)	Erato Ioannou, CYQAA Administrative Officer Alexia Pilakouri, CYQAA Education Officer Eleni Deligianni, CYQAA Education Officer Anthi Prokopa, CYQAA Education Officer George Aletraris, CYQAA Education Officer	Working conditions and development opportunities (ESG 3.5); Independence (ESG 3.3); Staff involvement in external quality assurance processes (ESG 2.3)	
15.30-15.35	Review panel break			
15.35-16.35	Meeting with the person(s) responsible for internal quality assurance within CYQAA	Professor Mary Koutselini, Chairperson of CYQAA Council (and members of the Council) Erato Ioannou, CYQAA Administrative Officer	CYQAA's internal quality assurance and professional conduct arrangements (ESG 3.6)	

16.35-17.00	Tour of facilities			
As necessary	Wrap-up meeting among panel members and coffee			
<b>DAY 2: 03.10.2018</b>				
8.30-9.00	Review panel private meeting			
9.00-9.55	Meeting with representatives of the Ministry of Education and Culture	Minister of Education and Culture (to be confirmed by the Minister's Office) Egli Pantelaki, Permanent Secretary of the MOEC Terpsa Constantinidou, Acting Director of the Department of Higher Education, MOEC Andreas Papoulas, Chief Education Officer, Department of Higher and Tertiary Education, MOEC Senior Education Officer Department of Higher and Tertiary Education, MOEC TBA Christiana Malioti, Senior Accountant	CYQAA independence (ESG 3.3), funding and human resources (ESG 3.5); CYQAA thematic analyses (ESG 3.4)	
9.55-10.00	Review panel break			
10.00-11.15	Meeting with heads of reviewed HEIs: universities and non-university HEIs (all types of CYQAA decisions represented: accreditation, second evaluation and refusal of accreditation)	Prof. Pantelis Sklias, Rector of Neapolis University Prof. Andreas Anayiotos, Rector of the Cyprus University of Technology Prof. Philippos Pouyioutas - Rector of the University of Nicosia Prof. Kostas Gouliamos, Rector of European University Cyprus Professor Leonidas Phylactou, Provost, Cyprus School of Molecular Medicine will attend Mr. George Kriticos, General Director, Global College	External quality assurance processes and methodologies; experts' performance; external evaluation reports; CYQAA criteria for decisions, and appeals (ESG 2); CYQAA independence (ESG 3.3) and accountability, incl. external feedback collection (ESG 3.6)	
11.15-11.20	Review panel break			
11.20-12.05	Meeting with quality assurance officers of HEIs	Prof. Athanasios Gagatsis, Former Vice Rector for Academic Affairs, University of Cyprus Dr. Cosmina Theodoulou Academic and Quality Assurance Coordinator, UCLan Cyprus	External quality assurance processes and methodologies: internal quality assurance in CYQAA processes (ESG 2.1); HEI involvement in the design of CYQAA methodologies, and fitness-for-purpose of methodologies (ESG 2.2); CYQAA accountability, incl. external feedback	

		<p>Dr. Costas Kyriakou, Acting Chair of the Internal Quality Committee of Frederick University</p> <p>Dr Christos Hadjiyannis, Chair of the Internal Quality Committee of the Cyprus Institute of Marketing (CIM)</p> <p>Dr. Michalis Yiangou, Vice President for Operations of the Cyprus Institute (CI)</p> <p>Dr Theodoros Panayiotou, Chair of the Internal Quality Committee Cyprus International Institute of Management (CIIM)</p>	collection (ESG 3.6); CYQAA thematic analyses (ESG 3.4)	
12.05-12.10	Review panel break			
12.10-13.00	Meeting with representatives from the reviewers' pool: national experts (face-to-face meeting) (the following categories of experts represented: academic, infrastructure and student welfare experts, and professional practitioners / experts)	<p>Prof. Andreas Kapardis, Academic Expert from the University of Cyprus</p> <p>As. Prof. Stelios Stylianou, Academic Expert from the Cyprus University of Technology</p> <p>Mr. Loukas Petrou, Infrastructure Expert from the Cyprus Scientific and Technical Chamber (E.T.E.K.)</p> <p>Ms Katerina Evaggelou, Student welfare expert from the University of Cyprus</p> <p>Ms Melina Pyrgou Professional Practitioner / Expert (Lawyer's Association)</p>	External quality assurance processes and methodologies; selection and training of experts; reporting; criteria for decisions (ESG 2.1-2.6); Independence (ESG 3.3); professional conduct and feedback collection (ESG 3.6)	
13.00-13.30	Discussion among panel members			
13.30-14.30	Lunch			
14.30-15.30	Meeting with representatives from the reviewers' pool: international experts (Skype meeting)	<p>Prof. David Allen – International Expert from the University of Leeds</p> <p>Prof. Nikolaos Papadakis – International Expert from the University of Crete</p> <p>Prof. Olympia Bekou – International Expert from the University of Nottingham</p> <p>Prof. Geert Deconinck – University of Leuven</p>	External quality assurance processes and methodologies; selection and training of experts; reporting; criteria for decisions (ESG 2.1-2.6); Independence (ESG 3.3); professional conduct and feedback collection (ESG 3.6)	

15.30-15.35	Review panel break			
15.35-16.20	Meeting with stakeholders: representatives of the Rectors' Conference of Cypriot Universities and Associations of Non-University HEIs, and employer representatives	Socratis Katsikas, Vice President of the Rector's Conference (Rector of the Open University) Mr. Demetris Chistophorou – Chair of PASISTE Mr. Pambos Neophytou – Chair of SAISTEK Mr. Savvas Adamides – Chair of SIAEK Mr. Kyriakos Angelides Business Association Coordinator of The Cyprus Employers & Industrialists Federation (OEB) Mr. Leonidas Paschalidis, Director of Development of The Cyprus Chamber of Commerce & Industry (KEBE)	Involvement of HEIs / employers in CYQAA governance (ESG 3.1) and design of external quality assurance processes (ESG 2.2); CYQAA independence; (ESG 3.3), accountability (ESG 3.6); usefulness of CYQAA thematic analyses (ESG 3.4)	
16.20-16.25	Review panel break			
16.25-17.10	Meeting with stakeholders: representatives of the Pancyprrian Federation of Student Unions (POFEN) and students-experts	Georgia Yiangou, President of the student Union (POFEN) Natia Karayianni, Vice-Chairperson of the Council of the Youth Board of Cyprus Anastasia Panteli, EEC student member Giorgos Longinos, EEC Student member	Student involvement in CYQAA self-assessment. Student involvement in CYQAA governance (ESG 3.1), design of external quality assurance processes (ESG 2.2) and implementation of processes (ESG 2.3). Selection and training of students-experts (ESG 2.4); professional conduct (ESG 3.6); CYQAA independence (ESG 3.3), accountability (ESG 3.6) and thematic analyses (ESG 3.4)	
As necessary	Wrap-up meeting among panel members and coffee			
DAY 3: 04.10.2018				
9.00-10.00	Morning meeting among panel members to agree on final lines of enquiry			

10.00-11.00	Meeting with the CYQAA Council Chair and members to clarify any pending issues	Prof. Mary Koutselini, Chair of the CYQAA Council Professor Constantinos Christou, Vice-Chairperson of CYQAA Council Professor Diofantos Hadjimitsis, Member of CYQAA Council Professor George Demosthenous, Member of CYQAA Council	Outstanding issues	
11.00-13.00	Private meeting among panel members to agree on the main findings			
13.00-14.00	Lunch			
14.00-15.00	Final debriefing meeting with the CYQAA Council members and staff to inform about preliminary findings	Prof. Mary Koutselini, Chair of the CYQAA Council Prof. Andreas G. Orphanides – Member of the CYQAA Council Erato Ioannou, CYQAA Administrative Officer	Preliminary findings from the review	

## ANNEX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE REVIEW

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

### Annex I: TERMS OF REFERENCE

April 2018

#### **1. Background and Context**

##### **1.1 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Cyprus**

Higher Education in Cyprus is offered by public and private universities as well as by public and private institutions at non university level.

The competent authority responsible for all HEIs is the Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC).

**1.1.1** Public universities are established by law and they are financed primarily by the government. The University of Cyprus and the Cyprus University of Technology are conventional universities which have as their main goal to promote education and research. The Open University of Cyprus is a distance learning university which aims to provide access to higher education to adult learners and to promote lifelong learning. Before the establishment of CYQAA, public universities were not externally evaluated and accredited by a national quality assurance body. Now, public universities are obliged by law to submit their programs of study for external evaluation-accreditation by CYQAA.

**1.1.2** Private universities are autonomous to define their own goals and strategies. They have undergone external evaluation within the framework of the previous legislation, by the Evaluation Committee for Private Universities (ECPU) and they were provided with a licence to operate on the basis of a relevant decision by the Council of Ministers. They are established and financed by non-governmental institutions or founders. Private universities are obliged by law to submit their programs of study for external evaluation-accreditation by CYQAA.

**1.1.3** Public institutions of higher education are non-university institutions which provide, primarily, vocational education and training. Before the establishment of CYQAA, these institutions, were not externally evaluated and accredited by a national quality assurance body.

**1.1.4** Private Institutions of Tertiary Education are non-university institutions which offer a wide range of academic as well as vocational programs of study at the following levels:

- Certificate (One Year, 60 ECTS)
- Diploma (Two Years, 120 ECTS)
- Higher Diploma (Three Years, 180 ECTS)
- Bachelor Degree (Four Years, 240 ECTS)
- Master Degree (One to Two Years, 90 or 120 ECTS)
- PhD Degree (Three to Four Years)

It should be noted, that up until the establishment of CYQAA, programmatic external evaluation by the relevant national quality assurance body was not obligatory.

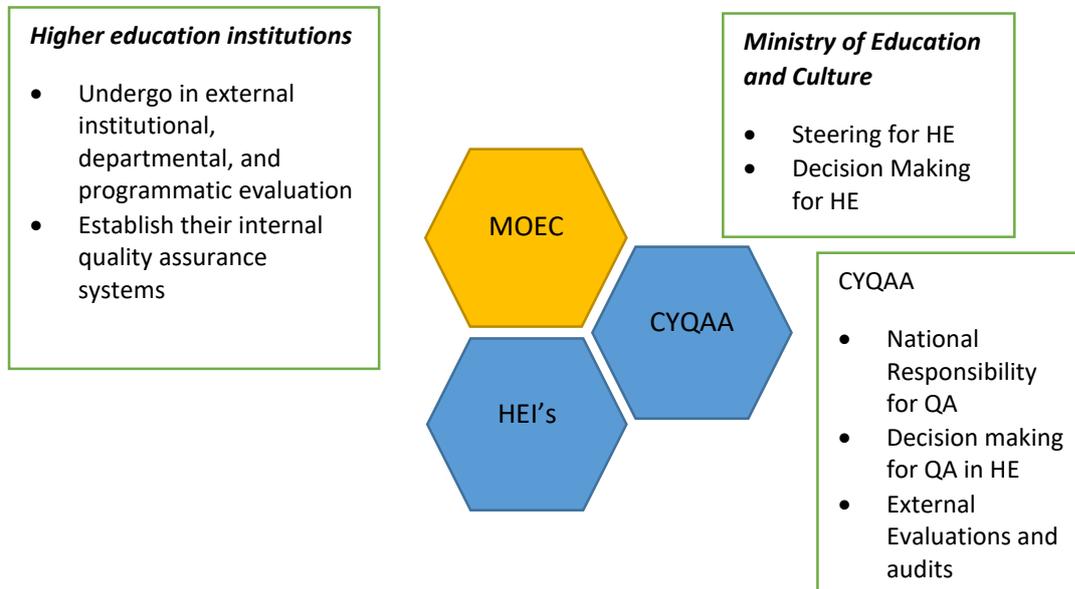
##### **1.2 Quality Assurance in Higher Education**

CYQAA is responsible to ensure the quality of higher education in Cyprus, and to support through the procedures provided by the relevant legislation, for the continuous improvement and upgrading of

higher education institutions and their programs of study. One of the primary aims of CYQAA is to provide those conditions necessary for the creation of a quality driven culture.

The main areas of CYQAA’s responsibilities, according to the legislation, are presented in 2.1.

**Figure 1: The national quality assurance system in Cyprus**



Quality of higher education is an inseparable component of government policy to further develop higher education and establish Cyprus as an international and regional education centre. A pivotal moment for the accomplishment of the strategic goals of the MOEC was the establishment of the “Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education” (CYQAA) in November of 2015 [Law 136(I)/2015].

CYQAA is steered by a Council of eleven members, including its President. The Council is appointed by the Council of Ministers for a five-year period on the basis of recommendations from the Minister of Education and Culture. According to the legislation, eight council members are academics, at the rank of Professor or Professor Emeritus, who have experience in university administration matters and on issues of quality assurance in higher education. Two members of the Council come from professional organizations and one member is an undergraduate student representative. It is noted that the student representative’s term of office has a duration of two years.

The Agency assumed the responsibilities of quality assurance bodies which were previously operating in Cyprus: The Council of Educational Evaluation-Accreditation, the Advisory Committee on Higher Education, and the Evaluation Committee for Private Universities.

- The Council of Educational Evaluation-Accreditation (*SEKAP*), was the competent authority responsible for the external evaluation and accreditation of programs of study offered by private, non-university HEI’s. It has to be noted that external evaluation and accreditation of programs of study was not compulsory and was sought for by HEIs on a voluntary basis. It should also be highlighted that according to the previous legislative framework the accreditation of programs of study had to be ratified by the Minister of Education and Culture.
- The Advisory Committee on Higher Education (*SETE*) was responsible for the establishment of non-university public and private HEIs, as well for the examination of new programs of study offered by private non-university HEI’s. SETE acted as an advisory body to the Minister of Education and Culture. Its competency was limited to advising the Minister with regards to the

registration of programs of study as well as the establishment of HEIs at non-university level and by no means this constituted the accreditation of the said programs and institutions.

- The Evaluation Committee for Private Universities (ECPU), was the competent authority responsible for the external evaluation of private universities and their programs of study. ECPU's decisions had to be ratified by the Minister of Education and Culture.

With the enactment of the new legislation and the establishment of CYQAA, prevailing approaches to quality assurance radically changed with the implementation of transparent procedures for external evaluation and accreditation equal for all. The most significant improvements provided for by the new legislative framework are:

- The legal obligation for HEIs (public and private at university and non-university level), for external evaluation, both programmatic and institutional.
- The compliance of the external evaluation standards and indicators with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).
- The compulsory evaluation and accreditation of cross-border education offered by local institutions in member states or third-party countries
- Scrutiny of the preconditions for the provision, by foreign institutions, of cross-border education in Cyprus.
- Examination of inter-institutional collaborations which lead to the award of joint degrees.

Most importantly, CYQAA acts as a catalyst for the creation of a quality driven culture, through which HEIs are enabled to enhance their quality assurance procedures and mechanisms.

CYQAA has been an ENQA affiliate since April 2016 and is applying for ENQA membership.

CYQAA is applying for registration on EQAR.

## **2. Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation**

This review will evaluate the way in which and to what extent CYQAA fulfils the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*. Consequently, the review will provide information to the ENQA Board to aid its consideration of whether membership of CYQAA should be reconfirmed and to EQAR to support CYQAA application to the register.

The review panel is not expected, however, to make any judgements as regards granting membership.

### **2.1 Activities of CYQAA within the scope of the ESG**

In order for CYQAA to apply for ENQA membership and for registration in EQAR, this review will analyse all CYQAA activities that are within the scope of the ESG, i.e. reviews, audits, evaluations or accreditation of higher education institutions or programmes that relate to teaching and learning (and their relevant links to research and innovation). This is regardless of whether these activities are carried out within or outside the EHEA, and whether they are obligatory or voluntary.

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

- Institutional evaluation – accreditation;
- Departmental evaluation- accreditation;
- Programme evaluation – accreditation;
- Joint programme evaluation – accreditation;
- Evaluation and accreditation of cross-border education offered by local institutions in member states or third-party countries;
- Assessment of the conditions for the provision of cross-border education from foreign institutions in Cyprus;
- Audit.

Furthermore, the self-assessment report (and external review report) should also address CYQAA processes for the recognition of the accreditation activity of other quality assurance agencies and in particular how CYQAA ensures ESG compliance in cases where the agencies are not registered in EQAR.

### **3. The Review Process**

The process is designed in the light of the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* and in line with the requirements of the *EQAR Procedures for Applications*.

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-assessment by CYQAA including the preparation of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit by the review panel to CYQAA;
- Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report by the review panel;
- Scrutiny of the final evaluation report by the ENQA Review Committee;
- Analysis of the scrutiny by the ENQA Board and their decision regarding ENQA membership;
- Follow-up of the panel's and/or ENQA Board's recommendations by the agency, including a voluntary follow-up visit.

#### **3.1 Nomination and appointment of the review team members**

The review panel consists of four members: one or two quality assurance experts, an academic employed by a higher education institution, student member, and eventually a labour market representative (if requested). One of the members will serve as the chair of the review panel, and another member as a review secretary. For ENQA Agency Reviews at least one of the reviewers is an ENQA nominee (most often the QA professional[s]). At least one of the reviewers is appointed from the nominees of either the European University Association (EUA) or the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), and the student member is always selected from among the ESU-nominated reviewers. If requested, the labour market representative may come from the Business Europe nominees or from ENQA. An additional panel member may be included in the panel at the request of the agency under review. In this case an additional fee to cover the reviewer's fee and travel expenses is applied.

In addition to the four members, the panel will be supported by the ENQA Secretariat review coordinator who will monitor the integrity of the process and ensure that ENQA expectations are met throughout the process. The ENQA staff member will not be the Secretary of the review and will not participate in the discussions during the site visit interviews.

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

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

#### **3.2 Self-assessment by CYQAA, including the preparation of a self-assessment report**

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

- Self-assessment is organised as a project with a clearly defined schedule and includes all relevant internal and external stakeholders.
- The self-assessment report is broken down by the topics of the evaluation and is expected to contain, among others: a brief description of the national HE and QA system; background description of the current situation of the Agency; an analysis and appraisal of the current situation; proposals for improvement and measures already planned; a SWOT analysis; each criterion (ESG part II and III) addressed individually. All agency's QA activities (whether within

their national jurisdiction or outside of it, and whether obligatory or voluntary) will be described and their compliance with the ESG analysed.

- The report is well-structured, concise and comprehensively prepared. It clearly demonstrates the extent to which CYQAA fulfils its tasks of external quality assurance and meets the ESG and thus the requirements of ENQA membership.
- The self-assessment report is submitted to the ENQA Secretariat who has 4 weeks to pre-scrutinise it before forwarding the report to the panel of experts. The purpose of the pre-scrutiny is to ensure that the self-assessment report is satisfactory for the consideration of the panel. The Secretariat will not judge the content of information itself but whether the necessary information, as stated in the Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews, is present. For the second and subsequent reviews, the agency is expected to enlist the recommendations provided in the previous review and to outline actions taken to meet these recommendations. In case the self-assessment report does not contain the necessary information and fails to respect the requested form and content, the ENQA Secretariat reserves the right to reject the report and ask for a revised version within 4 weeks. In such cases, an additional fee of 1000 € will be charged to the agency.
- The report is submitted to the review panel a minimum of six weeks prior to the site visit.

### **3.3 A Site Visit by the Review Panel**

CYQAA 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 2,5 days. The approved schedule shall be given to CYQAA at least one month before the site visit, in order to properly organise the requested interviews.

The review panel will be assisted by CYQAA in arriving in Nicosia, Cyprus.

The site visit will close with a final de-briefing meeting outlining the panel's overall impressions but not its judgement on compliance or granting of ENQA membership.

### **3.4 Preparation and completion of the final evaluation report**

On the basis of the review panel's findings, the review secretary will draft the report in consultation with the review panel. The report will take into account the purpose and scope of the evaluation as defined under articles 2 and 2.1. It will also provide a clear rationale for its findings with regards to each ESG. A draft will be first submitted to the ENQA review coordinator who will check the report for consistency, clarity and language and it will be then submitted to CYQAA within 11 weeks of the site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If CYQAA 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 CYQAA, finalise the document and submit it to ENQA.

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

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

CYQAA is also requested to provide a letter addressed to the ENQA Board outlining its motivation applying for membership and the ways in which CYQAA expects to contribute to the work and objectives of ENQA during its membership. This letter will be discussed along with the final evaluation report.

#### 4. Follow-up Process and Publication of the Report

CYQAA will consider the expert panel's report and will publish it on its website once the ENQA Board has made its decision. The report will also be published on the ENQA website, regardless of the review outcome and decision by the ENQA Board. CYQAA commits to preparing a follow-up plan in which it addresses the recommendations of the review panel and to submitting a follow-up report to the ENQA Board. The follow-up report will be published on the ENQA website, in addition to the full review report and the Board's decision.

The follow-up report will be complemented by a small-scale visit to the agency performed by two members of the original panel (whenever possible). This visit will be used to discuss issues, based on the ESG, considered as of particular importance or challenge by CYQAA. Its purpose is entirely developmental and has no impact on the judgement of membership and/or compliance of the agency with the ESG. Should the agency not wish to take advantage of this opportunity, it may opt out by informing the ENQA Review Coordinator about this.

#### 5. Use of the report

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

The review report is used by the Board of ENQA for the purpose of reaching a conclusion on whether CYQAA has met the ESG and can be thus admitted/reconfirmed as a member of ENQA. The report will also be used for registration on EQAR, and is designed so as to serve these two purposes. However, the review report is to be considered final only after being approved by the ENQA Board. Once submitted to CYQAA and ENQA and until it is approved by the Board the report may not be used or relied upon by CYQAA, the panel and any third party and may not be disclosed without the prior written consent of ENQA. CYQAA may use the report at its discretion only after the Board has approved of the report. The approval of the report is independent of the decision on membership.

The Chair of the panel shall remain available to respond to questions of clarification or further information from the EQAR Register Committee provided that the ENQA Secretariat is copied in all such requests.

#### 6. Budget

CYQAA shall pay the following review related fees:

Fee of the Chair	4,500 EUR
Fee of the Secretary	4,500 EUR
Fee of the 2 other panel members	4,000 EUR (2,000 EUR each)
Fee of 2 panel members for follow-up visit	1,000 EUR (500 EUR each)
Administrative overhead for ENQA Secretariat	7,000 EUR
Experts Training fund	1,400 EUR
Approximate travel and subsistence expenses	6,000 EUR
Travel and subsistence expenses follow-up visit	1,600 EUR

This gives a total indicative cost of 30,000.00 EUR VAT excl. for a review team of 4 members. In the case that the allowance for travel and subsistence expenses is exceeded, CYQAA 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 CYQAA if the travel and subsistence expenses go under budget.

The fee of the follow-up visit is included in the overall cost of the review and will not be reimbursed in case the agency does not wish to benefit from it.

In the event of a second site visit required by the Board 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.

#### **7. Indicative Schedule of the Review**

Agreement on terms of reference	February 2018
Appointment of review panel members	April 2018
Self-assessment completed	May 2018
Pre-screening of SAR by ENQA coordinator	May 2018
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	June/July 2018
Briefing of review panel members	August 2018
Review panel site visit	Late September/Early October 2018
Draft of evaluation report and submitting it to ENQA coordinator for pre-screening	November 2018
Draft of evaluation report to CYQAA	December 2018
Statement of CYQAA to review panel if necessary	December 2018
Submission of final report to ENQA	January 2019
Consideration of the report by ENQA Board and response of CYQAA	February 2019 (depending on the date of the ENQA Board meeting)
Publication of the report	February/March 2019



## ANNEX 3: GLOSSARY

CAF	Common Assessment Framework
CBHE	cross-border higher education
CYQAA	Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education
DL	distance learning
EEA	European Economic Area
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EEC	External Evaluation Committee (panel of experts conducting an external evaluation)
EER	External Evaluation Report
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQA	external quality assurance
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register
ESG	<i>Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, 2015</i>
ESU	European Students' Union
GIER	General Internal Evaluation Report
HEI	higher education institution
IQA	internal quality assurance
MOEC	Ministry of Education and Culture
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
POFEN	Pancyprian Federation of Student Unions
QA	quality assurance
QAA Laws	Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education and the Establishment and Operation of an Agency on Related Matters Laws
SAR	self-assessment report
SCL	student centred learning
ToRs	Terms of Reference

## **ANNEX 4: DOCUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE REVIEW**

### **DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY CYQAA**

Self-Assessment Report and annexes, including:

Annex 1: The Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education and the Establishment and Operation of an Agency on Related Matters Laws of 2015 and 2016

Annex 2: Higher Education Institutions' Feedback - Questionnaire

Annex 3: Application for Institutional Evaluation – Doc. Number: 200.2

Annex 4: Application for Departmental Evaluation – Accreditation – Doc. Number: 200.3

Annex 5: Application for Evaluation – Accreditation (Program of Study) – Doc. Number: 200.1

Annex 6: Examples of Analyses by the Agency's Officers

Annex 7: Questionnaire for the Members of the External Evaluation Committees

Annex 8: Guidelines for the Members of External Evaluation Committees

Annex 9: Statutory Declaration Confirming the Absence of Conflict of Interest of the Members of the External Evaluation Committees

Additional documents provided by CYQAA at the panel's request:

Addendum to the SAR: Clarifications in response to the panel's questions before the site visit

CYQAA budget breakdown

2016-2020 Strategic Plan

2016 and 2017 Annual Activity Reports (draft for 2017)

Statistics on programme evaluations

Criteria for audits

External Evaluation Reports for institutional evaluation and joint programme evaluation (examples)

Decision taken upon completion of an assessment of conditions for the provision of CBHE by foreign HEIs (examples)

Documents downloaded by the panel from the CYQAA website:

Quality Policy Statement

External Evaluation Report template

External Evaluation Reports for programme evaluations (examples)

### **OTHER SOURCES USED BY THE REVIEW PANEL**

CYQAA website

Ministry of Education and Culture website

European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes



**THIS REPORT** presents findings of the ENQA Agency Review of the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education (CYQAA) undertaken in 2018.

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**2018 ENQA AGENCY REVIEW**