

Approval of the Application
by Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria
(AQ Austria)
for Renewal of Inclusion on the Register

Register Committee
 4-5 November 2019

Ref. RC25/A64

Ver. 1.0

Date 2019-11-05

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Application of:	22/12/2017
Agency registered since:	29/11/2014
External review report of:	20/06/2019
Review coordinated by:	ENQA - European Association for Quality Assurance of Higher Education
Review panel members:	Jon Haakstad (chair), Pedro Teixeira (academic), Anastasia Demydenko (student), Heli Mattisen
Decision of:	5 November 2019
Registration until:	30/06/2024
Absented themselves from decision-making:	N/A
Attachments:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Confirmation of eligibility, 24/01/2018 2. External Review Report, 20/06/2019 3. Applicant's statement on the report, 25/04/2019

1. The application of 22/12/2017 adhered to the requirements of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.
2. The Register Committee confirmed eligibility of the application on 24/01/2018.
3. The Register Committee considered the external review report of 20/06/2019 on the compliance of AQ Austria with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015 version).

Analysis:

4. In considering AQ Austria's compliance with the ESG, the Register Committee took into account:
 - *Quality Audits of internal quality management systems at Austrian public universities and at universities of applied sciences (compulsory) and in EHEA countries.*

- *Institutional and programme accreditation at Austrian private universities and universities of applied sciences (compulsory)*
- *Voluntary accreditation of continuing education study programmes at Austrian higher education institutions*
- *System accreditation and programme accreditation in Germany (compulsory)*
- *International programme accreditation (voluntary);*
- *Institutional accreditation in Switzerland;*
- *Voluntary Evaluation of programmes at HEIs (in Austria and abroad)*

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5. The activity “notification of foreign study programmes offered in Austria” is not assessed by the review panel since this activity has been interrupted and the new regulations were not in place at the time of the review.

6. The Register Committee found that the report provides sufficient evidence and analysis on AQ Austria’s level of compliance with the ESG.

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

ESG 2.6 Reporting

In its initial application for inclusion the Register Committee flagged AQ Austria’s publication of external QA reviews, as at that time only a few reports have been published.

In the 2019 external review of AQ Austria, the panel’s analysis show that the agency has since published in full all its accreditations and audits related to its activities in Austria and abroad. The panel further commented that AQ Austria’s website however needs to be further improved in terms of accessibility and user-friendliness and recommended that the agency develops a database of reports to make the results of its quality assurance activities more accessible to its stakeholders.

While the Register Committee concluded that the agency has addressed its flag, the Committee further underlined the panel’s recommendation.

ESG 3.3 Independence

In its previous application, the Register Committee expressed concerns with regards to the possibility of the Austrian Ministry to dismiss a decision of accreditation by the agency and has therefore flagged AQ Austria’s independence of formal outcomes.

In considering this matter the panel stated in its review report (2019) that the legal framework stipulates the independence of the Board of AQ Austria. While the responsible Minister can withhold the decision of the Board, this can be done only in case of unlawful acts and with “overarching political deliberations”.

The Register Committee concluded that a change in accreditation of decisions can only happen in exceptional situations and therefore concluded that the flag has been satisfactorily addressed.

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ESG 3.4 Thematic analysis

At the time of its previous review in 2014, the Register Committee noted that AQ Austria was working on its first thematic analysis report on the development of quality assurance in Austria, and has not yet produced documentation to evidence substantial compliance.

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In its 2019 review report the panel's findings show that the agency has since produced a number of reports focused on the results of QA processes and related issues in higher education.

While the Register Committee underlined the recommendations of the panel for a further development of the thematic analysis, the Register Committee concluded that the flag has been satisfactorily addressed.

ESG 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

In its previous decision of inclusion, the Register Committee noted that the internal quality assurance system have been recently put in place, and therefore has flagged this matter for the next external review of the agency.

According to the 2019 external review report of AQ Austria, the agency has clearly defined processes for all its activities and consolidated its work as a result of its internal quality assurance processes.

The Register Committee therefore concluded that the flag has been addressed.

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

Conclusion:

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

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

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

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10. AQ Austria therefore continues to comply substantially with the ESG as a whole.

11. The Register Committee therefore renewed AQ Austria's inclusion on the Register. AQ Austria's renewed inclusion shall be valid until 30/06/2024¹.

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

Brussels, 24 January 2018

Confirmation of Eligibility: Application for Inclusion/Renewal of Inclusion on the Register

Application no. A64 of 22/12/2017

We hereby confirm that the application by for renewal of registration is eligible.

Based on the information and draft terms of reference provided, the external review coordinated by fulfils the requirements of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.

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

- *Accreditation of private universities in Austria,*
- *Accreditation of programmes at private universities in Austria,*
- *Accreditation of universities of applied sciences,*
- *Accreditation of programmes at universities of applied sciences in Austria,*
- *Audit of internal quality management systems at Austrian public universities and universities of applied sciences,*
- *Accreditation of continuing education programmes at higher education institutions in Austria,*
- *International accreditation,*
- *System accreditation of German higher education institutions,*
- *Programme accreditation at German higher education institutions,*
- *Notification of foreign degree programmes in Austria,*
- *Evaluation of programmes at higher education institutions.*

Furthermore, the self-evaluation report and external review report should also address the agency's recognition procedure of external QA activities of other agencies and how AQ Austria will ensure that the decisions taken on the basis of reviews carried out by other agencies are in line with the ESG, especially in case the agency is not registered on EQAR.

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Please ensure that 's self-evaluation report covers all the afore-mentioned activities.

We further remind you that the following issues were raised when was admitted to the Register, and should be addressed in your self-evaluation report and the external review report:

ESG 2.6 – Reporting [ESG 2005: standard 2.5]

At the time of the external review AQ Austria was yet to complete and publish the first reports of its external reviews.

The Register Committee noted that it is AQ Austria's policy to publish the full reports of its external reviews and that a number of reports have been made available (following its external review) on the website.

AQ Austria is expected to provide evidence of full implementation in the next review of the agency.

ESG 3.4 Thematic analysis [ESG 2005: standard 2.8]

It is within AQ Austria's legal mandate to carry out system-wide and cross-sector analyses of the Austrian higher education system. The review panel noted that the agency is working on its first report on the development of quality assurance in Austria and that a separate department has been set up within the Agency for these tasks. Since the work is in progress, AQ Austria has not yet produced documentation that can evidence substantial compliance with this standard. This matter requires attention in the future but the Register Committee noted that preparatory work is in train.

ESG 3.3 Independence [ESG 2005: standard 3.6]

The Register Committee noted that formal approval of accreditation decisions by the Minister in charge of higher education does not include the possibility to change or to ask for a revision of AQ Austria's decision. The Minister could, however, deny an accreditation approval, although this has not happened so far.

The Register Committee noted that this could be a constraining factor in the independent activity of the agency and warrants further attention in the next review of the agency.

ESG 3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct [ESG 2005: standard 3.8]

The Register Committee noted that AQ Austria's internal quality assurance processes have recently been put in place and that they have not yet been tested. The implementation of the internal quality assurance system is expected to be addressed in the next external review of the agency.


We confirm that consultancy services are activities outside the scope of the ESG. However, where consultancy services relate to issues covered by the

ESG (e.g. consultancy as support for higher education in the preparation of a review) AQ Austria is expected to demonstrate that adequate policies and processes are in place to prevent conflict of interest in performing their QA function and a clear separation exist between such activities and the agency's assessment procedures (see Annex 5 of the Use and Interpretation of the ESG for the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies¹).

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

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

Yours sincerely,

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

Colin Tück
(Director)

Cc: ENQA

¹Use and Interpretation of the ESG for the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies, Version 2.0 of November 2017
https://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/eqar/official/RC_12_1_UseAndInterpretationOfTheESG_v2_0.pdf

Hopbach Achim

Von: Hopbach Achim
Gesendet: Donnerstag, 25. April 2019 12:26
An: Pedro Teixeira
Betreff: AW: ENQA Review - AQ Austria - Preliminary Report
Anlagen: AQ_Austria_Preliminary_Report_23thApril_AQ comments.docx

Dear Pedro,

thank you very much for the draft report. I understand that AQ Austria is requested to comment on factual errors only and not to make any other comments at this point of time. Hence I will give general comments on the report and particular on the findings only after receipt of the final version.

As regards factual accuracy I'd like to congratulate the panel for presenting precise and correct information. I'd like to suggest only two very minor corrections:

- P 6: The German name of AQ Austria goes without article (marked in track changes).
- P 14: It should read „notification“ instead of „registration“ (marked in track changes).

In addition I'd like to make one suggestion:

On p 14 it is correctly explained that „Since 2014, the agency is also responsible for the notification of foreign study programmes offered in Austria.“ Although this is correct, I suggest to add information that the activities in this field have been discontinued due to a ruling of the constitutional court as it is correctly mentioned on p 20. Otherwise it seems a bit odd that on p 3 the panel explains why the notification of foreign degree programmes have not been taken into account in the review.

I hope this last suggestion is not considered inappropriate.

Best regards,
Achim

Von: Pedro Teixeira [pedrotx@fep.up.pt]
Gesendet: Dienstag, 23. April 2019 16:58
An: Hopbach Achim
Cc: Anais.Gourdin@enqa.eu; Jon.Haakstad@outlook.com
Betreff: ENQA Review - AQ Austria - Preliminary Report

Dear Achim,

I hope all is well and that you had a nice Easter.

Please find attached the preliminary version of the report for factual revision by AQ Austria. On behalf of the panel, I would welcome any comments that AQ Austria may have on the factual accuracy of the report. I should add that the final version of the report will be proofread before being submitted to the ENQA Board. The deadline for your comments should be 7th May (2 weeks).

Best wishes,

Pedro

Pedro Nuno Teixeira
Associate Professor - Faculty of Economics - U. Porto Director - CIPES - Centre for Research in Higher Education Policies