

**Approval of the Application**  
**by Flemish Council of Universities and University Colleges**  
**(VLUHR QA)**  
**for Renewal of Inclusion on the Register**

**Register Committee**  
 16 March 2020

**Ref.** RC26/A76  
**Ver.** 1.0  
**Date** 2020-03-19  
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<b>Application of:</b>	09/07/2018
<b>Agency registered since:</b>	07/05/2013
<b>External review report of:</b>	19/09/2019
<b>Review coordinated by:</b>	European Association for Quality Assurance of Higher Education (ENQA)
<b>Review panel members:</b>	Stephen Jackson (chair), Asnate Kažoka (secretary), Bernard Coulie (academic), Mykyta Yevstifejev (student)
<b>Decision of:</b>	16/03/2020
<b>Registration until:</b>	30/09/2024
<b>Absented themselves from decision-making:</b>	none
<b>Attachments:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <a href="#">Confirmation of eligibility, 01/08/2018</a></li> <li>2. External Review Report, 19/09/2019 (see separate file)</li> <li>3. <a href="#">Request to the Review Panel, 20/01/2020</a></li> <li>4. <a href="#">Clarification by the Review Panel, 12/02/2020</a></li> <li>5. <a href="#">Applicant's statement on the report, 27/02/2020</a></li> </ol>

1. The application of 09/07/2018 adhered to the requirements of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.
2. The Register Committee confirmed eligibility of the application on 01/08/2018.
3. The Register Committee considered the external review report of 19/09/2019 on the compliance of VLUHR QA with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015 version).

4. The Register Committee sought and received clarification from the chair of the review panel (see clarification of 12/02/2020).

5. The Register Committee further considered VLUHR QA's statement on the external review report of 27/02/2020.

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### **Analysis:**

6. In considering VLUHR QA's compliance with the ESG, the Register Committee took into account:

- Programme assessments
- Joint programmes assessments

7. Projects are not within the scope of the ESG and, thus, not pertinent to the application for renewal of the inclusion on the Register.

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

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

### **ESG 2.1 – Consideration of internal quality assurance**

10. In its analysis the panel commented on the alignment of both sets of criteria with the ESG Part 1. While the *Manual for the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes* explicitly refers to the ESG Part 1, the panel noted that the VLUHR QA's *Manual for External Quality Assurance in Flemish HE* does not refer specifically to the ESG, but covers their dimensions.

11. Based on the panel's analysis, ESG 1.1 appears to be covered either through NVAO's institutional reviews or within VLUHR QA's own reviews for institutions without such an institutional review. The panel nevertheless had some suggestions to articulate the link better.

12. The panel particularly commented that some aspects of ESG 1.2, ESG 1.4 and ESG 1.8 were not sufficiently addressed by VLUHR QA's standards. According to the panel, the ESG 1.10 was also threatened by the fact that it was not known whether VLUHR QA will continue to perform programme assessments after 2022.

13. **The Register Committee considered that the panel's analysis suggested that ESG Part 1 was not sufficiently addressed in the main activity of VLUHR QA. The Committee was therefore unable to concur with the panel's conclusion of substantial compliance, but concluded that VLUHR QA complies only partially with ESG 2.1.**

## ESG 2.3 – Implementing processes

14. The Register Committee sought and received clarification from the panel on whether it finds that the assessments with the result “satisfactory for a limited period” are adequately followed-up by NVAO and the Government.

15. The panel clarified in its response that in case of conditions the panel needs to set the timeframe in which the conditions should be met and addressed. The panel further added that it considered the current system a sufficient follow-up model and did not find it necessary to have separate follow-up procedure for recommendations.

**16. The Register Committee concluded that the current arrangements were suitable and effective for following-up assessments with the result “satisfactory for a limited period”. As this meets the minimum requirements, the Register Committee concurred with the panel’s conclusion that VLUHR QA (substantially) complies with the standard.**

## ESG 3.1 – Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

17. The panel’s analysis showed that there is a lack of involvement of stakeholders in the governance of VLUHR QA. As noted in the external review report, the QA Board does not include stakeholders from Flemish community. Furthermore, the panel noted that the composition of the Advisory Council did not reflect the variety of stakeholders.

18. In its statement of February 2020, VLUHR QA further elaborated on its approach of involving stakeholders through the Advisory Council and declared its intention to widen the variety of stakeholders on the Council.

**19. Given that the key stakeholders (students, higher education institutions) are involved and given that VLUHR QA is taking active steps to broaden the representation, the Register Committee could concur with the panel’s conclusion of compliance.** The Committee nevertheless underlined the panel’s recommendation that VLUHR QA consider the involvement of a broader range of stakeholders.

## ESG 3.4 – Thematic analysis

20. In its analysis the panel noted that due to the limited number of assessment procedures under the current arrangements, VLUHR did not publish analysis based on the findings of external quality assurance activities.

21. The panel also expressed its concerns as this issue was already noted in the previous review.

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22. The Register Committee therefore concurred with the panel and concluded that VLUHR QA complies only partially with the ESG 3.4.

### ESG 3.5 – Resources

23. The Register Committee flagged this issue in its previous decision.

24. As noted by the panel in its external review report, there has been significant decrease in VLUHR QA’s funding between 2015 and 2018. VLUHR, however, considered and the panel was convinced that the balanced budget planned until 2022 is realistic. Furthermore, the panel was convinced that additional income after 2022 could stem from the assessment of institutions and programme assessments according to the European Approach.

25. The Register Committee was aware that the situation beyond 2022 is difficult to predict at this stage, as it depends on future legal framework which is not yet decided. As VLUHR QA’s current resources are sufficient for its current operations, the Register Committee concurred with the panel’s conclusion that VLUHR QA complies with the standard.

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

### Conclusion:

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

Standard	Review panel conclusion	Register Committee conclusion
2.1	Substantial compliance	Partial compliance
2.2	Full compliance	Compliance
2.3	Substantial compliance	Compliance
2.4	Full compliance	Compliance
2.5	Full compliance	Compliance
2.6	Full compliance	Compliance
2.7	Full compliance	Compliance
3.1	Substantial compliance	Compliance
3.2	Full compliance	Compliance
3.3	Full compliance	Compliance
3.4	Partial compliance	Partial compliance
3.5	Substantial compliance	Compliance
3.6	Full compliance	Compliance

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28. The Register Committee considered that VLUHR QA only achieved partial compliance with two standards. With regard to ESG 2.1, there were some lacunae in addressing Part 1 of the ESG, but these were not extensive. With regards to ESG 3.4, VLUHR QA showed readiness and capacity to address the issue.

29. In its holistic judgement, the Register Committee therefore concluded that these two issues do not weigh heavily and VLUHR QA continues to comply substantially with the ESG as a whole.

30. The Register Committee therefore renewed VLUHR QA's inclusion on the Register. VLUHR QA's renewed inclusion shall be valid until 30/09/2024<sup>1</sup>.

31. The Register Committee underlined that once the legal framework becomes clear VLUHR QA is expected to report how its suite of activities will change after 2022, including how this will affect its resources.

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

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

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Flemish Council of Universities and University Colleges (VLUHR QAU)  
Quality Assurance Unit  
Ravensteingalerij 27 bus 3 & 6  
Klara De Wilde

1000 Brussels  
Belgium

Brussels, 1 August 2018

## Confirmation of Eligibility: Application for Inclusion on the Register

Application no. A76 of 09/07/2018

Dear Klara,

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

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

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

- *Programme assessments.*
- *Joint programmes assessments.*

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

The report should also address the way in which VLUHR QA separates between the services offered to higher education institutions and VLUHR QA's regular external quality assurance activities taking into account Annex 5 to the Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG<sup>1</sup>.

We further remind you that the following issues were flagged when VLUHR QA's registration was last renewed, and should be addressed in your self-evaluation report and external review report:

***ESG 2.3 – Implementing processes [ESG 2005: standard 2.6 & 3.4]***

<sup>1</sup>See :

[https://www.eqar.eu/assets/uploads/2018/04/UseAndInterpretationOfTheESGv2\\_0.pdf](https://www.eqar.eu/assets/uploads/2018/04/UseAndInterpretationOfTheESGv2_0.pdf)

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EQAR Founding Members:



*It should receive attention whether VLUHR QA has introduced its own procedures for follow-up between periodical assessments.*

***ESG 3.4 – Resources [ESG 2005: standard 3.6]***

*It should be addressed whether VLUHR QA has sufficient and sustainable resources to implement its activities.*

We confirm that the following activities are not within the scope of the ESG:

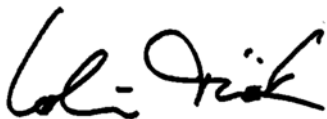
- *Projects.*

While these activities are not relevant to your application, it is VLUHR QA's choice – in agreement with the review coordinator – whether those activities should be commented upon by the review panel.

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 VLUHR QA'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. VLUHR QA 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 (coordinator)

Stephen Jackson, chair of the panel  
– by email –

Brussels, 20 January 2020

### Application by VLUHR QA for renewal of registration on EQAR

Dear Stephen,

The Flemish Council of Universities and University Colleges (VLUHR QA) has made an application for renewal of registration on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

We are contacting you in your capacity as chair of the panel that prepared the external review report of 19/09/2019 on which VLUHR QA's application is based.

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

1. The review report noted that since November, 2018 follow-up procedure became the part of all assessment procedures of Flemish study programmes but it is not mandatory. The panel also stated that no follow-up procedures had been performed.
2. In addition to VLUHR QA's own follow-up procedures, could you please clarify if for assessments with the result "*satisfactory for a limited period*" the panel considered that those issues are adequately followed up by the mechanisms that NVAO and the government put in place?

We would be grateful if it was possible for you to respond by 4 February 2020, and we would appreciate if you get in contact with us should that not be feasible.

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EQAR Founding Members:



Please note that EQAR will publish this request and your response together with the final decision on VLUHR QA's application. We, however, kindly ask you to keep information related to the application confidential until the final decision has been published.

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

Kind regards,

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

Colin Tück  
(Director)

**Cc:** Asnake Kazoka, secretary  
ENQA (coordinator)  
VLUHR QA

Colin Tück  
Director  
EQAR  
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By email

Dr Stephen Jackson  
Chair of the Panel

12 February 2020

Dear Colin

**Application by VLUHR for renewal of registration on EQAR**

Thank you for your recent letter asking for clarification of some matters included in the report from the review of VLUHR QA, conducted in June 2019, by a panel appointed by ENQA.

I have now had the opportunity to consult with members of the panel and check the documentation provided for the review. We can offer the following responses to the queries raised about the follow-up procedures for Flemish study programmes.

The new Flemish system has been in place since 2019. It makes a clear distinction between conditions and recommendations. However, at the time of the ENQA visit this system was not functional as the site visit took place in June 2019

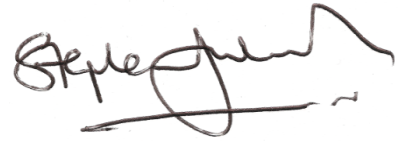
When a panel for programme assessment formulates conditions, they will also need to formulate a timeframe within which these conditions are to be met and assessed. The limited validity is set down in consultations with the programme owners, taking into account the timeframe in which the programme can satisfy the conditions. The maximum timeframe is three years. It takes effect immediately after the previous accreditation period and prompts a new accreditation decision no later than three months before the end of the timeframe.

The ENQA panel considers that the system, as it is in place now, ensures sufficient follow-up. The implementation of recommendations is not followed-up by a separate procedure and the ENQA panel does not find it necessary to do so.

I hope this provides the information requested by the EQAR Register Committee. Please let me know if you require any further points of clarification.

With best wishes

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephen Jackson', with a long horizontal stroke underneath.

Stephen Jackson  
(Chair of the ENQA Review Panel)

## Statement to EQAR

### *New Manuals*

As described in the peer review report, in September 2019 the Flemish Quality Assurance Framework changed. Therefore, VLUHR QA developed a new manual for programme assessments (from January 2020) that takes into account the legislative changes. The methodology of VLUHR QA remains the same. Nevertheless, VLUHR QA used the opportunity to respond to some of the panel's recommendations.

VLUHR QA also revised the Manual for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (from January 2020) from the same perspective. Both manuals can be found as appendix to this statement.

### *Follow up of the recommendations and suggestions*

The recommendations and suggestions from the ENQA Peer review report are an inspiration for VLUHR QA to continue working on the path of quality improvement. The recommendations and suggestions were discussed within the QA Board on October 18, 2019 and with the stakeholders at the meeting of November 25, 2019.

Several recommendations and suggestions have already been implemented, others are being reviewed before proceeding to implementation. Below we give an overview of the actual state:

#### *Governance*

The VLUHR QA board is currently composed of four independent members. It was a deliberate choice to avoid representatives from Flemish higher education institutions. This to ensure the independence of VLUHR QA as an independent agency within the Flemish Higher Education Council, where the higher education institutions are highly involved.

The panel recommended VLUHR QA to strengthen the governance by involving more stakeholders. VLUHR QA endorses the importance of stakeholder participation. Therefore, VLUHR QA is currently investigating the possibilities to involve more and other stakeholders in its governance:

- employers' and employees' organisations;
- Representation of the socio-economic sector;
- Representation of federations working on QA standards and/or quality assurance outside higher education.

In June 2020, the QA Board will hold a meeting with a wider group of stakeholder dedicated to its governance.

Students indicate that they are not interested in being part of the VLUHR QA Board as they feel well involved in VLUHR QA and feel represented in other bodies of VLUHR QA's governance such as the Advisory Board.

In May 2020, VLUHR QA will participate in a staff mobility project within the 'Erasmus+ Key Action 3: Support for policy reform' focusing on governance and stakeholder participation. A staff member will visit an agency in Iceland with a similar governance to VLUHR QA.

#### *International projects*

The panel advised to focus more on international visibility and participation in international projects. From 2019 on VLUHR QA strengthened its activity in this area. For example, VLUHR QA plays a role in 6 Erasmus+ KA3 projects mainly on quality assurance to strengthen its international network. VLUHR QA will also host the ENQA GA in Brussels in October 2020 (organised by AEQES, MUSIQUE and VLUHR QA).

#### *ESG part 1*

The panel recommended to give explicit attention to a number of elements of ESG Part 1. These elements have been taken into account in the new manual for programme assessments, which took effect from 1 January 2020.

### *Follow up*

The panel recommended that the follow-up procedure should be considered a mandatory part of the assessment procedure. As indicated in the new manual for programme assessments, January 2020, the follow-up procedure is fully integrated in the assessment process.

### *VLUHR QA Board*

The panel recommended that the QA Board should read all reports before publication. This action is been taken. At least 2 members of the QA Board will read the report before publishing it. This gives the QA Board the opportunity to ask for clarification. However, the assessment panel remains the owner of the content of the report.

### *Thematic analysis*

The panel recommended a stronger focus on Thematic analysis and that it was important for higher education institutions to experience added value from its results. On its meetings in October 2019 and February 2020, the QA Board discussed a discussion note on thematic analysis. In this note the QA Board prioritises topics for further thematic analysis such a first results of the European Approach.