

Decision on the Substantive Change Report by Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)

Register Committee

Ref. RC/C89

Ver. 1.0

Date 2023-02-13

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Decision of:	2023-02-13
Report received on:	2022-11-29
Result:	Take note
Agency registered since:	2013-07-01
Last external review report:	2017-06-21
Registration until:	2023-06-30
Absented themselves from decision-making:	none
Attachments:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Substantive Change Report Decision of 2022-10-25 2. QAA response letter of 2022-11-29

1. The Register Committee considered the response of QAA (letter of 2022-11-29) to the decision of 2022-10-25 on QAA's earlier Substantive Change Report of 2022-05-16.
2. The Committee noted that QAA continues to classify Quality Evaluation and Enhancement of UK Transnational Higher Education (QE-TNE) as an activity outside the scope of the ESG.
3. The Committee noted that the following steps were taken to address the Committee's concerns related to the unclear presentation of the QE-TNE activity¹:
 - references to EQAR and the ESG have been removed from the QE-TNE handbook;
 - a disclaimer has been included stating that "the QE-TNE scheme is a programme of country specific quality enhancement thematic activity. It is not a quality assessment against the European Standards and Guidelines and the findings in this report do not have any regulatory status";
 - the link that directed users from QAA's external QA reviews to the QE-TNE page was removed.

¹<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/international/transnational-education/quality-evaluation-and-enhancement-of-uk-tne#qe-tne-participants>

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4. The Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG acknowledges that grey areas exist and certain activities might reasonably be designed and classified either as an external QA activity or as another type of activity. The Policy further sets out that the Register Committee “tries to follow the agency’s classification whenever reasonable”.
5. Based on the Policy and given that QAA took those steps that the Register Committee required (in its decision of 2022-10-25) as a minimum to ensure clarity, the Register Committee agreed to consider the QE-TNE as an activity outside the scope of the ESG.
6. **The Register Committee noted that the QE-TNE method nevertheless continues to resemble an ESG activity in certain aspects, as set out in paragraphs 11 & 12 of the Committee’s decision of 2022-10-25. In particular, the handbook notes that QE-TNE focuses on how the equivalence of student outcomes is ensured (p. 6 of QE-TNE handbook) and intends to “retain the trust in the UK’s quality assurance approach”; both could suggest that QE-TNE was an ESG-type review rather than an activity of a consultative nature or a type of thematic analysis.**
7. The Register Committee therefore concluded that there remains a high risk² that QE-TNE might be misconstrued as an ESG activity.
8. In QAA’s ongoing external review against the ESG this risk should be specifically addressed in relation to ESG 3.1³, in particular addressing how the agency ensures a clear communication and separation of QE-TNE from QAA’s activities within the scope of the ESG, considering the analysis in this decision as well as that of 2022-10-25.
9. Moreover, the Register Committee decided to add the following specific note⁴ to QAA’s register entry:

“Following QAA’s own classification, EQAR accepted that the QE-TNE scheme is a country-specific and thematic quality enhancement activity, i.e. a service offered to institutions, and not a quality assessment against the ESG. QE-TNE is thus outside the scope of the ESG and not covered by QAA’s EQAR registration; the resulting reports may not be used or presented as such.”

²In the understanding of item 1 of the approach to clarifying the scope of the ESG, see section 4.3 of the Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG.

³See EQAR Policy of the Use and Interpretation of the ESG, section 4.3 item 3 and p.17-19) <https://www.eqar.eu/about/official-documents/#use-and-interpretation-of-the-esg>

⁴See EQAR Policy of the Use and Interpretation of the ESG, section 4.3, item 4.

Melinda Szabo
Deputy Director
European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)
Aarlenstraat 22 Rue d'Arlon
1050 Brussels
Belgium

01452 557 000
www.qaa.ac.uk/contact-us

29 November 2022

Dear Melinda

QE-TNE Update

I write with reference to your email from 7 November 2022 regarding the Registers Committee decision re our QE-TNE scheme. In response to your email, I would like to inform you that QAA has taken the following actions:

1. We have removed all references, either implied or explicit, to EQAR, ENQA or the ESG from the method handbook and have re-published this handbook on our website. It is accessible here: <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/international/transnational-education/quality-evaluation-and-enhancement-of-uk-tne>
2. We have added the following disclaimer to both the handbook, and all reports related to this method: *"The QE-TNE scheme is a programme of country specific quality enhancement thematic activity. It is not a quality assessment against the European Standards and Guidelines and the findings in this report do not have any regulatory status"*.
3. We have amended our website to remove the hyperlink from our reviews page to QE-TNE. It is still accessible via our international activities page. This is to ensure that there is no confusion that this is a review method related to the ESG and our registration on EQAR.

All of the above have been completed.

Many thanks,



Alastair Delaney
Director of Operations and Deputy Chief Executive
QAA