

**Approval of the Application
by the Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation
of Higher Education (A3ES)
for Inclusion on the Register**

Register Committee

Ref. RC13/2014/15

Ver. 1.0

Date 2014-11-29

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Application of:	16/07/2014
External review report of:	June 2014
Review coordinated by:	ENQA
Review panel members:	Stephen Jackson (Chair), Christina Rozsnyai (Secretary), Mihai Floroiu, Jean-Marc Rapp, Karina Ufert
Decision of:	29 November 2014
Registration until:	30 June 2019
Absented themselves from decision-making:	Julio Pedrosa (member)

1. The application of 16/07/2014 adhered to the requirements of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.
2. The Register Committee considered the external review report of June 2014 on the compliance of A3ES with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). The Register Committee found it challenging in several instances to track the evidence of compliance with the ESG. Only after receiving additional clarification from A3ES and the Chair of the review panel (e.g. on ESG 2.1 – use of internal quality assurance procedures – and ESG 3.6 – operational independence) was the Register Committee able to concur with the panel’s conclusions.

Analysis:

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

ESG 2.2: The review report noted that employers are not yet in dialogue on higher education matters at national level and that students are mainly consulted via their membership in the Advisory Council.

The Register Committee received clarification from A3ES (letter of 24/10/14) that its Advisory Council includes representatives of student

unions as well as recognised professional organisations from industry, commerce and services.

The Register Committee concluded that even though the interest of employers might be low, the process of involving key stakeholders in A3ES' work could nevertheless be strengthened.

ESG 2.5: The Register Committee noted that the review panel was concerned that the evaluation reports provided only limited elaboration (p. 20) and recommended that the intended readership should be broadened, with reports geared towards the public with respect to their readability and accessibility.

The Register Committee received clarification from the chair of the review panel (letter of 27/10/14) that the agency was committed to the publication of information that is of value to the public. At the same time, the panel encouraged the agency to develop this area further. This issue has therefore been flagged.

ESG 3.6: The review report stated that three of the five members of the Board of Trustees are appointed by the Council of Ministers of Portugal (p. 11) following the proposal from the Minister in charge of higher education. The Board of Trustees further appoints the Management Board. The Register Committee sought clarification from the panel and the agency on the processes and criteria for the appointment of the Board of Trustees and the Management Board.

The Register Committee noted the panel's statement (letter of 27/10/14) that it has received assurances that the Board of Trustees – although they were appointed by the Secretary of State – acted independently. The panel also noted that the Management Board conducted its business with the support of the Trustees but without constraint or direction.

In its clarification A3ES underlined (letter of 24/10/14) that there are no members of the government present in the main governing bodies.

Based on the above, the Register Committee was able to concur with the panel's conclusion that A3ES operated independently.

ESG 3.7: The Register Committee noted that – according to the review report – the agency includes students in its audit teams and “increasingly” in the programme assessment committees.

The Register Committee received clarification from the agency (letter of 24/10/14) that – following a pilot phase earlier – starting with 2013/2014 students were appointed in principle to all programme

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assessment committees and their effective participation rate varied between 80% and 100% (depending on the scientific area), due to logistical problems in a number of cases.

The Register Committee acknowledged the progress made and considered that the practice of systematic involvement of students should be addressed in the next external review of A3ES. This matter has therefore been flagged.

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Conclusion:

4. **Based on the external review report and the considerations above, the Register Committee concluded that A3ES complies substantially with the ESG and, therefore, approved the application for inclusion on the Register.**

A3ES's inclusion shall be valid until 30/06/2019¹.

5. The following issues have been flagged for particular attention when considering a potential application for renewal of inclusion. A3ES is expected to address these issues specifically in its next self-evaluation report, setting out whether the issue has been resolved or indicating what progress has been made. A3ES is further responsible for informing the coordinator of the next external review and the review panel of the need to address these issues in the external review report.

ESG 2.5: Readability and accessibility of reports

It should receive attention whether reports are geared towards the public with respect to their readability and accessibility.

ESG 3.7: Participation of students in programme reviews

It should be analysed how students have been systematically included in expert groups for programme accreditation.

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