
ENQA AGENCY REVIEW: AGENCY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION (AEQES)

NORMA RYAN , OANA SARBU , JEAN-PIERRE FINANCE, ROK PRIMOZIC

13 FEBRUARY 2017

Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
INTRODUCTION	4
BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW AND OUTLINE OF THE REVIEW PROCESS	4
BACKGROUND OF THE REVIEW	4
MAIN FINDINGS OF THE 2011 REVIEW	4
REVIEW PROCESS	5
HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM OF THE AGENCY	6
HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN WALLONIA-BRUSSELS FEDERATION	6
QUALITY ASSURANCE	7
AGENCE POUR L'ÉVALUATION DE LA QUALITÉ DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPÉRIEUR (AEQES).....	8
AEQES'S ORGANISATION/STRUCTURE	8
AEQES'S FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES, PROCEDURES	10
AEQES'S FUNDING	11
FINDINGS: COMPLIANCE OF AEQES WITH THE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA (ESG)	12
ESG PART 3: QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES	12
ESG 3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY, AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE	12
ESG 3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS	14
ESG 3.3 INDEPENDENCE	15
ESG 3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS	17
ESG 3.5 RESOURCES	18
ESG 3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT	20
ESG 3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES	21
ESG PART 2: EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE	21
ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE	21
ESG 2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE	26
ESG 2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES	28
ESG 2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS.....	29
ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES	32
ESG 2.6 REPORTING	33
ESG 2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS.....	35
ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS	37
CONCLUSION.....	38
SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS	38

OVERVIEW OF JUDGMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	38
ANNEXES	40
ANNEX 1: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT	40
ANNEX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE REVIEW	43
ANNEX 3: GLOSSARY	48
DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY AEQES	49
OTHER REFERENCE SOURCES USED BY THE REVIEW PANEL	49

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report analyses the compliance of the **Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (Agence pour l'Évaluation de la Qualité de l'Enseignement Supérieur) (AEQES)** with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG, 2015). It is based on an external review conducted in a sixteen-month period, from November 2015 to February 2017. This is AEQES's second review; the agency has been a full member of ENQA since September 2011 and was listed in EQAR since December 2012. The process followed the revised ENQA Guidelines for Agency Reviews.

The analysis of the self-assessment report and of the Agency website, together with the interviews held during the site visit in September 2016, have demonstrated the way the AEQES responds nowadays to the ESG 2015 and also the status of the implementation of the recommendations for improvement from the previous ENQA evaluation.

The panel has noted the evident progress the Agency has made since the last review together with the substantial effort made by the Agency towards implementation of recommendations requiring legislative modifications.

The panel commends AEQES for the establishment of new robust standards and criteria that have enabled the Agency to engage in consistent and coherent activities, the reinforcement of mid-term follow-up evaluations (mandatory for all programme evaluations between two evaluations), for the diversity of expert's profiles, for the quality of its staff members, for the meta-analysis, for the international visibility in recent years, but at the same time, the panel considers that, for the next 5 years, the Agency will be underfunded (will face budgetary cut-offs), given that the policy makers have not shown interest in maintaining the budgetary funding to a sustainable level. Therefore, the panel considers the Agency to be fully compliant with all standards but one – the ESG standard 3.5 – *Resources*. The panel considers the Agency to be only partially compliant with ESG 3.5 and the Agency is recommended to take appropriate action to achieve full compliance with this standard.

Based on the fact that QA is a continuous process and there is always room for improvement, the panel offers also a number of recommendations for further improvement, hoping they will be considered for implementation by the Agency.

INTRODUCTION

This report analyses the compliance of the **Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (Agence pour l'Évaluation de la Qualité de l'Enseignement Supérieur) (AEQES)** with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*. It is based on an external review conducted in the sixteen-month period, from November 2015 to February 2017.

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. ENQA retains ownership of the present report. Should AEQES wish to re-apply to the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education, the report will serve this purpose as well.

As this is AEQES's second review, the panel examines and provides analysis of clear evidence of results in all areas and acknowledges progress from the previous review. The panel has adopted a developmental approach, as the *Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews* aim at constant enhancement of the agencies.

MAIN FINDINGS OF THE 2011 REVIEW

The previous AEQES's evaluation provided a clear description of the agency in 2011. The review panel appreciated *"the prevalence of a culture of consensus and discussion between AEQES and the higher education stakeholders in the French Community of Belgium"* and the role of AEQES *"to setting up a quality culture in higher education in dialogue with all stakeholders"*. It also noted the commitment and professionalism of the Agency's staff. At the same time, the previous evaluation expressed some concerns with the level of compliance with some of the standards, for example ESG 2.6. Follow-up procedures (*"a very weak follow-up process"*) or ESG 3.4 Resources (*"The amount of financial resources does not allow for any additional activities beyond the core tasks. Human resources are of similar concern, caused by the civil service status of the staff that makes hiring sufficient personnel difficult, although it found the quality of the existing staff to be excellent."*)

At the completion of its review in 2011 the panel concluded that AEQES was fully compliant with all areas of ESG, except:

ESG Part 2:

- **2.1 Use of internal quality assurance processes: substantial compliance**
"AEQES does evaluate quality in its processes and activities but does not at its foundation look at the ESG Part 1. A coherent quality policy or strategy at institutions is not investigated."
- **2.2 Development of external quality assurance processes: substantial compliance**
"Although beyond AEQES' control, the performance criteria were decided by government. On the other hand, AEQES involves higher education stakeholders and experts in adapting the criteria to given settings to some degree, and has initiated discussions to explore how changes can be made possible. In addressing the issue of performance indicators, AEQES must ensure that they are operational and ensure consistency in evaluations."
- **2.6 Follow-up procedures: partial compliance**
"AEQES has not incorporated the follow-up process into its quality evaluation system. The so-called "quality loop", whereby quality is planned, implemented, checked, and improved on an ongoing basis, is not anchored in the system."

ESG Part 3:

- **3.4 Resources: partial compliance**

“While the financial resources are sufficient for the agency’s core tasks, they do not allow for developmental activities either for institutions and only limited such activities internally. The human resources are insufficient even for the number of evaluations foreseen annually in the 10-year plan. The restrictions in human resources, both with regard to hiring regulations and number, were a matter of concern to the review panel. On a capacity level, the concern arises in relation to the developmental function of AEQES to ensure dissemination of best practice in quality assurance among its stakeholders.”

- **3.6 Independence: substantial compliance**

“The review panel found that AEQES is fully independent in its decision-making and processes and the development of its activities. It believes that the link with the ministry is somewhat restrictive, however, with regard to some budgetary use and is at least cumbersome with the staff hiring procedures controlled by through the ministry. While the review panel also recognises that AEQES does not feel any threat from the ministry link but enjoys its advantages, it recommends that AEQES discuss how it can enhance its image as a fully independent entity in the eyes of higher education institutions and the public. It recommends, moreover, that AEQES initiate discussions with the ministry on the possibilities of separating its staff recruitment and hiring procedures and full budgetary independence beyond the annual budget allocation and financial reporting to ensure accountability of public funds.”

- **3.7 External quality assurance criteria and processes used by members: substantial compliance**

“The review panel believes that AEQES has developed a rigorous external evaluation process and has succeeded, in the early phase of external evaluation in the French Community of Belgium, to install the concept of quality among higher education institutions already with the programmes evaluated so far... The panel recommends that AEQES, in consultation with the councils and ministry, develop a more substantial follow-up process in order to assure ongoing quality assurance in the system. The panel repeats its recommendation that AEQES include students in its expert panels. The panel repeats its recommendation in this context to publish the Quality Handbook and the guidelines for experts and for institutions in English.”

REVIEW PROCESS

The 2016 external review of AEQES 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 of AEQES was appointed by ENQA and composed of the following members:

- **Norma Ryan** (Chair), Independent consultant, Former Director of Quality Promotion Unit, University College Cork (UCC), Ireland– EUA nominee,
- **Oana Sarbu** (Secretary), Head of Experts and Inspectors Department, Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS), Romania – ENQA nominee,
- **Jean-Pierre Finance**, Professor Emeritus, the University of Lorraine, Advisor for EU affairs at the University Rectors’ Conference (CPU), France – EUA nominee,
- **Rok Primozic**, Master’s student in Educational Policies, University of Ljubljana, Former Chairperson of European Students’ Union (ESU), Slovenia – ESU nominee.

A preparatory telephone briefing was organised between the review panel and the ENQA review coordinator – Agnė Grajauskienė – to discuss the entire review process, and more specifically the: purpose of the review, roles and responsibilities of panel members, use and understanding of the ESG and judgment of compliance, link between evidence and information, analysis, and conclusions in the

review report, timeline and management of the site visit, drafting of the report; and submission of the final review report and the decision-making process.

The panel was in regular contact, permanently supported by the ENQA review coordinator.

Self-assessment report

The AEQES's Self-assessment report (SAR) was communicated to the members of the ENQA panel in a timely manner on June 2016 in the format of an electronic document. It provided a general overview of the French-speaking Belgian system of higher education and on the system of Quality Assurance in Wallonia-Brussels Federation. Furthermore, the SAR contained an overview of the structure and organisation of AEQES. It also provided clear and comprehensive information about the intended and actual role of AEQES and a discussion of the extent to which, in AEQES's own assessment, AEQES adheres to each ESG standard.

The last part of the SAR included a SWOT analysis, where AEQES reflected on its strong points and its weak points, which need further improvement.

Site visit

The Panel conducted a site visit to fully validate the self-evaluation and clarify any points at issue. The site visit took place on 5 – 7 September 2016 in Brussels. The Panel met for a preparatory meeting the day before the site visit to discuss the self-assessment report and to share first impressions regarding compliance with the ESG. The members also discussed the program of the visit and initial lines of questioning were distributed among panel members.

During the site visit, the Panel was able to speak with various stakeholder groups, including the Head of the Agency, the Self-Evaluation (SE) working group and the Methodological Developments (MD) working group, staff members, heads of higher education institutions, higher education institutions quality coordinators, students, government and ministries representatives, AEQES' evaluation partners, experts, etc.

The Review Panel considers that the three-day site-visit provided relevant information to support the external review and wishes to thank AEQES for the smooth organization of the site visit.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM OF THE AGENCY

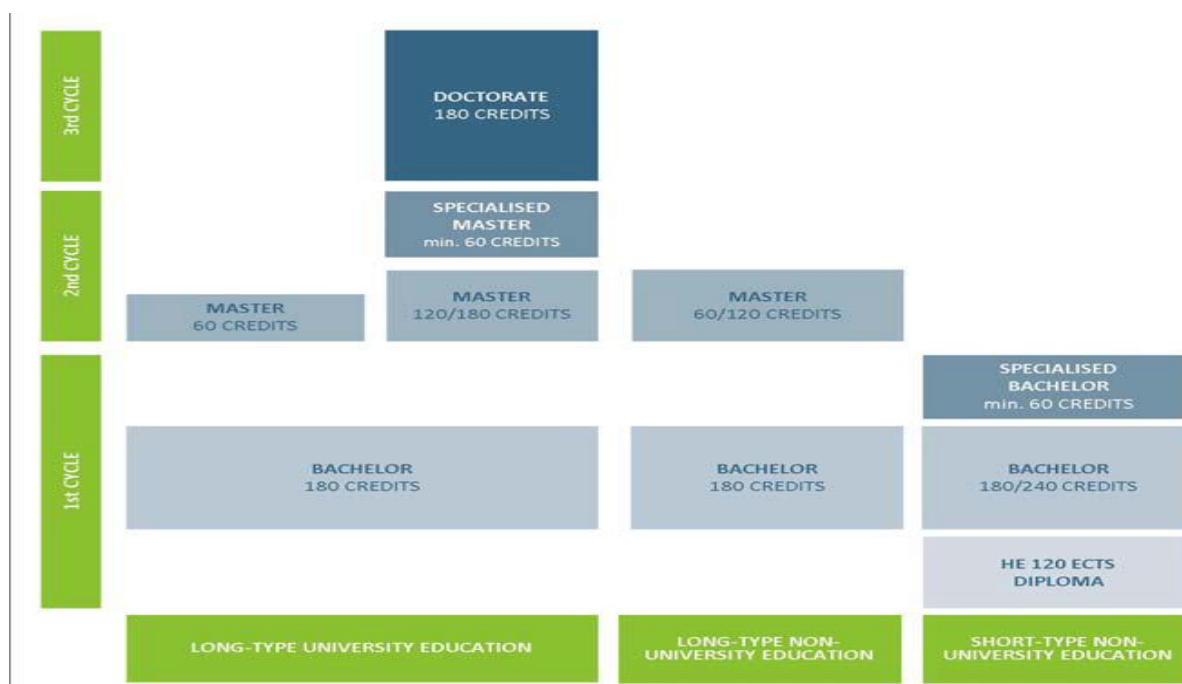
HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN WALLONIA-BRUSSELS FEDERATION

Belgium is a federal state which has three Communities and three Regions. The Federal State delegated the competence for education to each of the three Communities (French, Flemish and German-speaking). AEQES was created in 2002 to ensure the implementation of external quality assurance mechanisms and to support the development of internal QA mechanisms in Wallonia-Brussels Federation (WBF).

As described in the SAR submitted by AEQES, the WBF offers higher education study programmes in four sectors: the humanities and social sciences; health; science and technology; art. They are provided by various institutions, classified according to the type of education they offer: 6 universities, 20 university colleges, 16 art colleges and 84 adult vocational HEIs.

Higher education can also be provided by private institutions. These institutions award diplomas that are not recognised by the WBF, do not have access to public subsidies and are not subject to an external evaluation led by AEQES.

The universities, university colleges, arts colleges and adult vocational HEIs award Bachelor degrees and some of them Master degrees corresponding to a specified number of ECTS credits.



Structure of higher education in the WBF

All higher education bodies are grouped within the Academy for Research and Higher Education (ARES) - created on 1 January 2014. This Academy is responsible for ensuring the exercise of the various missions of higher education, research and service to the community and for encouraging cooperation between institutions. It consists of three thematic chambers for the subjects specific to each form of teaching and of several standing committees (one of them, the CoQER, examines topics relating to the quality of education and research). AEQES and ARES are working to conclude a cooperation agreement which aims to define the roles and responsibilities of the two bodies.

The higher education system in WBF has been reformed by *the Decree of 7 November 2013* defining the higher education landscape and the academic organisation of studies (known as the “*Landscape Decree*”). The aim of this reform is to create a single student status and to guarantee an organizational coherence in higher education, whilst stressing, among other points, the importance of the link between higher education and scientific research.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

By adopting the Declaration of Bologna in 1999, the WBF implemented a series of measures to modernise and harmonise higher education in line with the EHEA. One of the main action lines adopted was quality assurance in higher education.

The HEI’s were permanently encouraged to assume responsibilities for internal quality assurance: “Institutions of higher education shall be required to ensure quality management and assurance for all their missions” (Article 9, Decree of 31 March 2004), “Institutions of higher education shall be required to ensure quality management and assurance for all their activities and shall take all such measures as appropriate for an effective internal self-evaluation and its follow-up.” (Article 9 of the Decree of 7 November 2013).

To ensure the implementation of external quality assurance mechanisms and to support the development of internal QA mechanisms, in 2002 AEQES was created by law. The Agency started work in 2004. The AEQES is an independent public service agency, a full member of the European Network for Quality Assurance (ENQA) and included on the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) which develops a formative approach to quality assurance. Working in a context in which authorisations (habilitations in French) are granted *ex ante* by the Government, the results of the assessments have no formal impact in terms of financing or accreditation of higher education institutions in the WBF. The higher education actors consider this approach enables the institutions to promote the emergence and appropriation of a quality culture and to develop creativity. The Agency was reorganised in 2008 (*Decree of 22 February 2008*).

AGENCE POUR L'ÉVALUATION DE LA QUALITÉ DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPÉRIEUR (AEQES)

AEQES was established by the Decree of 14 November 2002 to implement the external quality assurance procedures and also to support the development of internal quality assurance structures in HEIs. AEQES started the conduct of external evaluations in March, 2004. The Decree of 22 February 2008 repealed the Decree of 2002 and established various measures relating to the organisation and functioning of AEQES. AEQES is an independent public sector agency, the only recognised external evaluation body by the WBF for the higher education 120 ECTS diplomas, bachelor's and master's degrees of the four types of HEIs (universities, university colleges, art colleges and adult vocational education institutions).

Since 2011, by virtue of an agreement with the authorities of the Autonomous University College of the German-speaking Community of Belgium, AEQES has been conducting external evaluations for higher education programmes offered to the German-speaking Community in Belgium.

Fully embedded in the European context, the Agency is responsible for assessing the quality of higher education and working for its continuous improvement. According to the Decree of 2008, the main tasks of AEQES are:

1. To ensure that the study programmes organised by the institutions are subject to regular evaluation, highlighting best practices and any inadequacies or problems that need to be resolved;
2. To ensure the implementation of evaluation procedures;
3. To promote, through collaboration with all higher education stakeholders, the implementation of practices aiming to enhance the quality of education in all institutions;
4. To provide information to the Government, stakeholders and beneficiaries of higher education on the quality of higher education offered in the WBF;
5. To formulate suggestions to policymakers for improving the overall quality of higher education;
6. To make any proposal deemed to be of use for the accomplishment of its missions, at its own initiative or at the Government's request;
7. To represent the WBF in national and international organizations in matters related to quality assurance in higher education.

AEQES has been a full member of ENQA since 2011 and has been registered on EQAR since 2012.

AEQES'S ORGANISATION/STRUCTURE

The Agency's structure includes at the time of the evaluation:

- The Steering Committee (24 members representing academic, administrative staff and students in HEI's, trade unions, public authorities, business, culture and society);

- The Board (Chairman and Vice-chairman of the Steering Committee, Head of the Executive Unit and, in an advisory capacity, the Director General of Higher Education and Scientific Research);
- The Executive Unit (Head of the Executive Unit, eight staff officers and two assistants)
- Complaints Management Commission (three members acting with full independence from the Agency).

The Steering Committee is responsible for the strategic and methodological changes, the approval of position papers and memoranda, the approval of a 10-year evaluation plan and discussion of the system-wide analysis etc.

The Board prepares the work of the Steering Committee plenary sessions, carries out all the missions that the latter delegates to it in its rules of procedure, and takes decisions on day-to-day business.

The Executive Unit implements the decisions of the Steering Committee and the Board. The main task of the Executive Unit staff members is to ensure a proper organisation of evaluations planned by the Agency.

To support its activities, the Steering Committee appointed nine working groups which are responsible for conducting desk research, analysing gathered data, making proposals and draft documents.

The working groups are:

- SELF-EVALUATION WG
- COMMUNICATION WG
- EXPERTS WG
- METHODOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS WG
- TEN-YEAR PLAN WG
- REPORTS WG
- REFERENCE FRAMEWORK WG
- STRATEGY AND METHODOLOGY WG
- FOLLOW-UP WG

Each group has its specific tasks according to the AEQES's development strategy and also according to the needs of the moment. The members of the working groups are Steering Committee members and external experts (representatives of the universities, representatives of the business, representatives of civil society etc.) and they are coordinated by a member of the Executive Unit.



Agency organisational chart (SAR – page 11)

AEQES'S FUNCTIONS, ACTIVITIES, PROCEDURES

AEQES is responsible for the external evaluation of the quality of higher education for 120 ECTS diplomas, bachelor and master programmes provided by all the HEIs: universities, university colleges, art academies and adult learning institutions in WBF. AEQES aims to improve and support development of a quality culture, stimulating co-operation among HEIs and disseminating good practices. It is in charge of the policies and guidelines concerning the external evaluation (including follow-up procedures) of HEIs and their programmes in the area. AEQES implements the following methods: on-site visits, peer reviews, publication of reports and follow-up plans.

The results of the evaluations conducted by AEQES therefore have no formal effects in terms of an institution's funding or authorization to operate. The programmes evaluated by AEQES are granted *ex-ante* by the Government.

The AEQES's evaluation of programmes is conducted in clusters. The clusters take several forms:

- Evaluation of a programme organised by several types of educational institutions;
- Evaluation of several programmes related to the same subject field, organised by one type of educational institution;
- Evaluation of several programmes organised by several types of educational institutions.

The evaluation of programmes in clusters enables the Agency to produce a thematic analysis at the end of all evaluation visits for a cluster.

Since October 2012, the Head of the Executive Unit has held an elected post on the ENQA Board. This involvement in ENQA's work reflects the determination of AEQES to contribute to the missions of the European association of quality assurance agencies, and enables the Agency to fulfil its seventh mission, i.e. to represent the WBF in national and international bodies relating to quality assurance in higher education. Membership in the ENQA Board gives international visibility to the Agency, and by extension higher education in the WBF, and is a valuable source of information on all strategic issues relating to these subjects. In the spring of 2014, AEQES co-founded with the French (CTI and HCERES) and Swiss (AAQ) agencies, the French network of quality assurance agencies (FrAQ-Sup) to promote discussions and cooperation in quality assurance in French-speaking higher education.

AEQES'S FUNDING

AEQES is a public entity sustained with public funds. The financial resources available to AEQES are provided by the Government of the French-speaking Community and are therefore conditioned by the constraints that have affected the economic situation. Since 2012, the Government has not reduced its allocation, but it has also announced that an increase of the allocation is not foreseeable in the near future. According to the current planning and financial conditions, the Agency is of the opinion that it can maintain its activities and volume of employment until 2020, but looking at the future in the context of the agency work plan and strategic plan, the sustainability of the agency can become a real problem in a shorter period of time, if the Government will not react to the agency's needs.

FINDINGS: COMPLIANCE OF AEQES 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.

2011 review recommendation

The review panel recommends that AEQES starts discussions with institutions and the government about shortening the current 10-year cycle of evaluations in order to ensure that quality assurance is ongoing in the higher education system.

Evidence

AEQES is responsible for the external evaluation of the quality of higher education of 120 ECTS diplomas, bachelor and master programmes provided by all the HEIs: universities, university colleges, art academies and adult learning institutions in WBF. The AEQES's evaluation of programmes are conducted in clusters. The clusters take several forms:

- Evaluation of a programme organised by several types of educational institutions;
- Evaluation of several programmes related to the same subject field, organised by one type of educational institutions;
- Evaluation of several programmes organised by several types of educational institutions.

The results of the evaluations conducted by AEQES have no formal effects such as accreditation or an impact on funding of the programme/institution. According to the WBF legislation the evaluation of programmes is conducted once every 10 years with a mid-term follow-up evaluation.

The Agency has two main objectives: accountability and quality enhancement. In order to achieve these goals, AEQES has issued a set of guidelines aimed at helping the implementation of its reference framework:

- Methodology of evaluation
- Guide for HE Institutions
- Guide for experts
- Quality Manual

All above-mentioned documents can be found on the agency's web page. Additionally, AEQES periodically collects and analyses the data from the surveys in order to adjust the process, if needed: "Results of surveys of institutions, students and experts".

The Agency conducts all its activity in full accordance with and respecting the values that can be found in the Ethic Code: independence, fairness, transparency, confidentiality, involvement, integrity, objectivity, consistency, personal involvement and respect for diversity.

Since 2009 – 2010, AEQES evaluated 262 programmes and published also 25 system-wide analyses.

The Agency has made extensive efforts to involve a variety of stakeholders in its activities, with particular emphasis in the case of students. The Steering Committee is composed of 24 full members

and 24 substitutes, with diverse backgrounds: universities, university colleges, art colleges, adult vocational education institutions, students, trade unions, the civil society, the professional world, and international experts. The same situation is true for the membership of Working Groups and panels (62% of external evaluators do not reside in the WBF).

The Strategic Plan 2016-2020 was developed in 2015 by the *Strategy and Methodology WG* which called on the services of a consultant from *Joassart and Goffin Consulting*, in accordance with a methodology proposed by this specialist. The Strategic Plan 2016-2020 seeks to ensure that the Agency is able to respond to the needs of the sector in terms of quality assurance and to the needs of AEQES for constant and permanent improvement.

Analysis

The Review Panel found the goals and objectives of AEQES are clear and publicly available on its web site. AEQES is the main actor in external quality assurance in WBF and it contributes significantly to the development of a quality culture in higher education in the French-speaking Community. The documents provided and the meetings with the different stakeholders involved in the work of AEQES enabled the Panel to conclude that the Agency has improved the quality of its work significantly, including the evaluation of programmes conducted in clusters facilitating cross-institutional comparisons within the jurisdiction and analysis, the involvement of a variety of stakeholders in its activities, the follow-up procedure, the elaboration of updated guidelines aimed at helping the implementation of the reference framework, the strategic plan 2016-2020. All documents and analyses conducted are publicly available and published.

Despite limited financial resources, the Agency has been successful in facing its challenges and implementing appropriate changes and improvements. Following the last ENQA evaluation, the Agency has progressively and increasingly involved different types of stakeholders in a variety of directions: for example, in the Steering Committee, in the Working Groups and in the evaluation panels. Student involvement has not been up to the Agency's expectations and discussions with HEIs representatives have shown that the situation is similar in the processes of internal quality assurance. However students are engaged in all evaluation panels established and they contribute to evaluations as full members of the panels. The Agency has expressed its desire to increase the level of student involvement in the activities of the Working Groups in particular and is continually making efforts to achieve this. The key activities of AEQES are related to quality improvement in services to the academic community and providing information to the public, to other stakeholders and participants (including students) of HEIs and study programmes. The Strategic Plan 2016-2020 addresses the needs of the sector in terms of quality assurance and the needs of AEQES to permanently improve. It has detailed clear actions to be taken over the next years with clear objectives and goals.

The Panel considers that the external quality assurance activities of the Agency take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part 2 of the ESG and that AEQES complies fully with all standards from Part 2 of the ESG. A more detailed discussion of how the Agency complies with the Standards in Part 2 of the ESG is provided in the section of this report dealing with consideration of Part 2 of the ESG.

Panel commendations

The Panel commends the Agency for the consistency and transparency of its works and activities, including the preparation of the Strategic Plan (2016 - 2020) following a wide consultation of the sector.

Panel recommendations

The recommendation on the length of time between full programme evaluations made by the panel who conducted the ENQA review in 2011 remains valid and the Agency should continue the negotiations with the Government in shortening the 10-year time interval between two external evaluations.

The Panel recommends to AEQES to continue supporting students and promoting quality assurance among students, in cooperation with the relevant student organisations.

Panel conclusion: fully 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.

Evidence

AEQES was established by the Decree of 14 November 2002 with the responsibility to implement external quality assurance procedures and also to support the development of internal quality assurance structures and systems in HEIs. AEQES commenced external evaluations in March 2004. The Decree of 22 February 2008 repeals the Decree of 2002 and establishes various measures relating to the organisation and functioning of AEQES (mission and tasks, structure and activities, budget etc.). AEQES is an independent public sector agency, the only external evaluation body recognised by the WBF for the delivery of 120 ECTS diplomas, bachelor's and master's degrees by the four types of HEIs (universities, university colleges, art colleges and adult vocational education institutions).

Since 2011, by virtue of an agreement with the authorities of the Autonomous University College of the German-speaking Community of Belgium, AEQES has been conducting external evaluations of higher education programmes offered to the German-speaking Community in Belgium.

Since April 2014, the amendments made to the AEQES Decree allow the hiring of staff using the agency's own funds (outside the Civil Service budget).

Analysis

The Panel found that AEQES is a formally recognised professional body established by law: the Decree of 22 February 2008 which specifies (Article 2): "An autonomous service shall be created, without legal personality, Agency for the evaluation of quality in higher education organised or subsidised by the French-speaking Community". The interviews with Ministry representatives included detailed discussions on the work of the Agency and the impact of the Agency in the Higher Education Area in the French speaking Community. The Ministry representatives were very positive in their comments on the role and value of the Agency's contributions to the continuing development of a quality culture in HEIs in WBF and convinced the Review Panel that the Agency is a highly respected organization, appreciated for its commitments to quality evaluation and quality enhancement in higher education. The HEIs representatives expressly recognised the important role of the Agency in the development of the quality culture, and consider that the Agency is acting as a partner in this regard and a real support for improvement of activities within the institutions.

AEQES has cooperation agreements with CTI (*Commission des Titres d'Ingénieur*) for the conduct of joint evaluations of engineering programmes and with MusiQuE (*Music Quality Enhancement*) for the evaluation of music programmes. The interviews with the representatives of these two agencies confirmed their respect and appreciation for the work of AEQES.

The Panel noted also that AEQES co-founded with the French (CTI and HCERES) and Swiss (AAQ) agencies the French network of quality assurance agencies (FrAQ-Sup) in order to promote discussions and cooperation in quality assurance in French.

Panel commendations

The Panel appreciates the international visibility of the Agency in recent years.

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.

2011 review recommendation

While the Review Panel recognises that AEQES does not feel any threat from the ministry link but enjoys its advantages, it recommends that AEQES discuss how it can enhance its image as a fully independent entity in the eyes of higher education institutions and the public.

It recommends, moreover, that AEQES initiate discussions with the ministry on the possibilities of separating its staff recruitment and hiring procedures from the ministry and establishing its full budgetary independence beyond the annual budget allocation and financial reporting to ensure accountability of public funds.

Evidence

AEQES was established by the Decree of 14 November 2002 as “an *autonomous service*, without legal personality”. In the SER, AEQES presents its independence at all levels: organizational independence, operational independence and independence of official results.

Considering the organizational independence, there is an independence of human resources. The members of the Steering Committee are nominated by the Government according to a legislated formula: 24 members representing academic, administrative staff and students in HEI’s, trade unions, public authorities, business, culture and society. Representatives from ministries overseeing higher education sit in on meetings but have no voting rights. The Steering Committee is responsible for the strategic and methodological changes, the approval of position papers and memoranda, the approval of a 10-year evaluation plan and discussion (without any interference or right to amend) of the system-wide reports submitted by the expert evaluation panels, etc. Taking into account the level of responsibilities of the Steering Committee, as outlined above, the Agency does not consider the presence of representatives of ministers responsible for higher education in the Steering Committee as an obstacle to its independence. The Steering committee delegated to the Expert WG the task of selecting experts and ranking would-be chairs. The Steering Committee is still responsible for approving the experts selection jurisprudence, each time the expert WG submits amendments and clarifications. To this end it is evident that the Agency operates independently in terms of the nomination and appointment of experts to evaluation panels and the evaluation reports. The Agency recruits experts from different countries and regions, in different ways. The Agency developed the AEQES database of experts with different profiles (academics, members from the business, social and cultural community, students, QA experts, educational experts, etc.). To assure the independence of the evaluation process, before each evaluation, the experts have to sign a “non-conflict of interest” declaration, part of the Code of Ethics. The staff members of the Agency are selected and act independently of the Ministry. Having no legal personality, the agency needs the ministry for the legal framework of this recruitment – contracts are established with the ministry and under the conditions

defined by the ministry (salary package). Since April 2014, staff can be hired using AEQES's funds independent of the Ministry.

Regarding its financial independence, AEQES receives its budget from the Ministry, but is autonomous in terms of decisions on all expenditure. The expenditure of the budget is decided internally within the Agency in accordance with the objectives and goals of its Strategic Plan.

The operational independence of the Agency is evident in its freedom to implement its methodology, to establish the Strategic Plan, the ten-year working plan, selection of experts, to establish the expert evaluation panels and also to offer opinions to the Government.

The official results (the final reports of programme evaluations) are the responsibility of the evaluation panel without any external influence. The AEQES Steering Committee or another body has no right to amend the work produced by the experts.

Analysis

Given the evidence presented in SER and the interviews during the site-visit, the Panel does not doubt that the definition and operation of AEQES procedures and methodologies, the nomination and appointment of external experts and the determination of the outcomes of its quality assurance processes are undertaken autonomously and independently, without third party influence.

Since the last ENQA review, following an amended decree in 2014, AEQES made an important step in separating its staff recruitment and hiring procedures from the ministry. Previously, the Agency was required to hire civil servants using Ministry funds and could not use its own financial resources to hire staff, making it difficult to hire sufficient numbers of staff upon occasion.

The experts interviewed by the Panel particularly stressed the autonomy they were given in writing the final evaluation reports and for proposing the recommendations for the evaluated institutions. The representatives of higher education institutions valued the large number of experts appointed to the panels who do not reside in the WBF (62% of the total number of experts) which provides, *inter alia*, international visibility to the programmes and the institutions and encourages diversity within their programmes.

The reports issued following the external evaluation procedures and the system-wide analyses are approved at the monthly meetings of the Steering Committee. The content and the conclusions of these reports cannot be altered by the Steering Committee, but this aspect was not very clear at the beginning to the Panel. The description of the evaluation phases presented in SER, does not specify adequately the role of the Steering Committee in the evaluation process.

In line with the financial independence, AEQES receives an annual allocation from the Government of the French-speaking Community. In recent years, the Government has not reduced the budgetary allocation, but also announced that an increase of the allocation is not foreseeable in the immediate future. The Panel considers that the mode of the Agency's financing does not affect its independence, but it has the potential to affect its sustainability in the future.

Panel commendations

The Panel commends AEQES for the large number of experts included in evaluation panels who do not reside in the WBF (62% of the total number of experts employed). This ensures the results of the evaluation processes are more transparent and more reliable and consistent and benchmarked internationally.

Panel recommendations

The Panel recommends that the Agency defines, in a clearer way than at present, the role of the Steering Committee in the description of the evaluation process, and in particular places emphasis on the approval process (**without any interference by the SC**) of the external evaluation reports.

Panel conclusion: fully 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.

Evidence

On the Agency's website different types of analyses can be identified: system-wide analyses, "meta-analyses" and other types of thematic publications.

During the last five years, 25 system-wide analyses have been presented, published and disseminated. These analyses are the result of programme evaluations in clusters, a very interesting aspect being the fact that these clusters are built out of different groupings of study programmes. Therefore, one can identify the following cluster types:

- a programme organised by several types of educational institutions;
- several programmes related to the same subject field, organised by one type of educational institutions;
- several programmes organised by several types of educational institutions.

The meta-analyses published by AEQES are: TRENDS, FOCUS and PATHWAYS. Responsibility for the development of meta-analyses rests with the Steering Committee via its Reports WG.

TRENDS is focused on seven recurrent themes in the evaluations conducted in 2009-2010: visibility and opportunities, the trend for professionalization in education, the design and the monitoring of programmes, the development of competency frameworks, the place of the research in HEIs, the place of foreign languages in the educational processes and the resources.

FOCUS publications examine six themes from the evaluations conducted in 2010-2012: the evolution of societal needs and the updating of programmes, the flexibility of students' routes, teacher trainings, research, autonomy vs regulation, quality assurance – methods and cultures.

PATHWAYS focusses on the degree of appropriation of the *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (revised ESG) by the institutions.

There is a third type of thematic analysis: either reports written by the Executive Unit (for example, on the AEQES/CTI cooperation), or master theses written by students who interned at the Agency. To date, three master theses, on different subjects related to quality assurance, are available on the Agency's website.

There is also another kind of report or analysis as: Results of the surveys addressed to experts and HEIs to elicit their view on important trends in higher education, and to hear about their expectations towards AEQES, Report on the first AEQES' annual seminar, etc.

Analysis

The evaluation of programmes in clusters enables the Agency to produce system-wide analyses at the end of all evaluation visits for a cluster. The experts produce a detailed report on the situation at the

level of WBF, with specific reference points. The fact that evaluating programmes in clusters presents different combinations for AEQES in the process of external evaluation and enables the Agency to conduct multiple interesting and complex analyses. The interviews with Government and HEI representatives have shown that they are aware of these analyses and consider them very useful in developing macro or institutional strategies. An example mentioned several times during the meetings is the working on the reform for teacher training. The AEQES system wide analysis on primary teacher education is among the documents that are referred to as an input to the discussions. At the same time, the system-wide analyses are not yet well known to students and socio-professional partners. The Panel discussed this aspect with the management of the Agency which mentioned that it will pay more attention to developing its communication strategy. The improvement of the activity of the Communication Working Group is one of the main priorities in the AEQES strategy.

The Review Panel appreciated and acknowledged the value of the meta-analyses produced by AEQES. Even if the documents are published only in French on the AEQES website, they have been analysed by French speaking panel members. The topics submitted through the meta-analyses conducted by AEQES (system-wide analyses represented the starting point for meta-analyses) are covering all aspects concerning quality assurance (QA), system and societal expectations, impact, acceptance of changes, research in the field of education, etc.

Many stakeholders mentioned the work of AEQES in providing thematic analysis as clearly contributing to development of an improved quality culture of the higher education system in WBF.

Nevertheless, taking into account that AEQES collects a wealth of information about individual programmes and/or institutions, the Panel considers that it will be useful for the Agency to develop a data management system, to facilitate retrieval of data for appropriate usage.

Panel commendations

The Panel commends AEQES for its transversal analyses which are very complex, analysing in depth the situation of HE in WBF.

Panel recommendations

The Review Panel recommends that the Agency further enhances the dissemination process of its thematic analyses in such a manner that the analyses become a useful tool for all interested stakeholders. Furthermore, the Panel considers that it will be useful for AEQES to further develop its communication strategy and its management data system.

Panel conclusion: fully compliant

ESG 3.5 RESOURCES

Standard:

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

2011 review recommendation

The Board strongly recommends to improve the flexibility of staff enrolment in order to be able to accomplish collateral activities important for its mission such as developmental activities addressed to training activities or another quality analyses, as well as to face a more demanding situation in the future. AEQES should initiate discussions with the ministry on the possibilities of separating its staff recruitment and hiring procedures and full budgetary independence beyond the annual budget allocation and financial reporting to ensure accountability of public funds.

Evidence

AEQES is a public entity financed to a large extent by public funds. The financial resources available to AEQES are provided by the Government of the French-speaking Community and are therefore conditioned by the constraints that have affected the economic situation. Since 2012, the Government has not reduced its allocation, but it has also announced that an increase of the allocation is not foreseeable in the near future. According to the current planning and, if financial conditions do not change, the Agency considers that it can maintain its activities and volume of employment until 2020, but looking at the future in the context of the Agency work plan and strategic plan, the sustainability of the Agency could become a real problem in a shorter period of time, if the Government does not or is unable to react to the Agency's needs.

Up to 2014 only the Ministry could hire agency's staff, but since April 2014 the Agency is authorized to hire staff from its own funds. There is now 11 staff members employed for managing the workload relating to external evaluations and other kinds of activities such as trainings, preparing analyses, providing secretariat services to the Working Groups, etc.

The offices of AEQES are located within the premises of the Ministry of WBF and the conditions are suitable for the staff members and for the conduct of other activities of the Agency.

Analysis

Reviewing the situation as presented in the SAR as well as considering discussions held with the Agency's representatives and policy makers, the Panel considers that the Agency will be underfunded for the next 5 years for the level of activities planned. The estimated revenues and expenditures according to the proposed work-plan for the following years, together with the fact that an increase of the allocation from Government is not foreseeable in the near future, all indicate that, by 2020, the Agency will face a negative financial balance. This aspect may negatively influence the quality of future activities in the near future and could potentially lead to the closure of the Agency by the end of 2020.

The number of employees in the Agency has increased from 6 to 11 since the last evaluation due to the Agency having the authority to hire its own staff. Even if the Agency's personnel has increased, discussions with the staff members, evaluation experts and HEI representatives all indicate that the staff of the Executive Unit are still "overloaded". The Agency has diversified and increased its activities and there is a need to ensure that there is an adequate number of appropriately qualified staff to ensure high quality delivery of the activities and their level of complexity. Consequently, staff professionalism, efficiency and availability are key factors in enabling the Agency to be an example of good practice (success) in many of conducted activities. The high quality of the staff currently employed by the Agency was stressed by many of those interviewed, together with the high degree of professionalism and commitment to the activities of the Agency exhibited by the staff.

The Panel noted that during the site-visit 3 new staff members commenced employment with the Agency, whilst another member of the existing staff has resigned from the Agency. The Agency's management would like to be able to employ more staff, but limited financial resources are directly influencing the human resource capability.

With the exception of students and representatives of employers, all interviewed were aware of the Agency's financial status and were convinced that a solution will be found to address this issue given the impact of the AEQES activity in the HE system. The Panel considers that AEQES needs the support of all stakeholders to solve the financial issues and a larger dissemination of the impact of the Agency's activities will engage students and representatives of employers in supporting the Agency in its discussions with policy-makers.

Panel recommendations

The Panel recommends that the Agency continues its discussions with policy-makers on its financial situation, in order to ensure the continuation of its activities while maintaining the same level of responsibility and quality standards.

Panel conclusion: partially 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

AEQES is continuously concerned with quality, integrity and improvement of its submitted activity. Thus, AEQES elaborated a Quality Manual which established the responsibilities and requirements for the main directions of the AEQES's activities: The Management process (Plan), the Quality Assurance process (Check and Act), the Support process (Do) and the Operational process (Do). The Agency has adopted a "Code of Ethics" which set out the values and principles that Steering Committee, the Board, the executive unit and the experts are expected to respect. AEQES consults its stakeholders on a regular basis through surveys or consultations, while permanently monitoring the quality of its own activity by submitting questionnaires after each evaluation process to experts, representatives of the evaluated institution and students. The results obtained are periodically analysed after submitting the questionnaires: "Results of surveys of institutions, students and experts". Every two years, using the instruments mentioned above, the Agency compiles an activity report and publishes it on its website.

Every year the Executive Unit holds a residential seminar to take stock of the previous year, examine how to improve practices and prepare for the following year.

Despite limited financial resources, AEQES has been constantly engaged in activities aimed to improving the knowledge of its technical staff and external evaluators. Periodic training sessions were organized for external evaluators, and technical staff has been encouraged to constantly improve by participating in different conferences and workshops.

Analysis

The quality of internal documents and the consistency of AEQES activities described by all interviewed persons convinced the Review Panel that AEQES operates within the requirements set by the relevant legislation and that it has put in place an internal quality assurance system that follows the four steps of any QA process done in accordance with "Plan – do – check – act" (PDCA). The Review Panel does not doubt that AEQES works to ensure the integrity of its actions and ethical standards in the conduct of its evaluations and other activities. The training seminars for experts were appreciated by interviewees and they commented on the improvement in quality of the training year after year. In addition, the Review Panel noted that internal quality assurance activity is an integral part of routine activities of the staff.

The Quality Manual establishes the responsibilities and requirements for the main directions in the AEQES's activities very clearly and the "Code of Ethics" sets out the values and principles which have to be respected. The interviewees demonstrated that people know these documents and they are doing their best to respect it.

The Panel noted the efforts of the Agency to be involved in periodic consultation of the stakeholders on the quality of the activities conducted and its capability to react to the results of these conclusions.

Panel commendations

The Panel gives credit to AEQES for the way it adapts, has a well-structured formal system for obtaining information concerning the quality of its own activities and, as the interviewees have confirmed during the site visit, the way it responds. AEQES knows how to listen, has an open mind and is very dynamic.

Panel conclusion: fully 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

The Decree of 22 February 2008, Article 21 stipulates: “The Agency shall be subject to a cyclical external review of its activities and methods, at least every 5 years in accordance with the recommendations of ENQA. The results shall be published in a report, which shall indicate the degree of the Agency’s compliance with the ESG. This report shall be submitted to the Government and to Parliament.”

The previous evaluation by ENQA was conducted in 2011 and in September 2013 the Agency elaborated its Progress Report. The Report presented to the Board of ENQA the current state of affairs concerning actions on the recommendations for improvement made by the Panel and highlighted in the letter from the President of ENQA to AEQES.

AEQES is listed in EQAR since 2012-12-03.

Analysis

The evidence demonstrates that AEQES respects its compliance with the ESG, asking for an external evaluation once every five years. Also, the Agency has taken into account the external recommendations and recognizes the value of engaging with the wider QA community and appreciates the potential for learning from this. The Panel has analysed the way the Agency has reacted to previous recommendations, and commends the actions taken, noting that some of the recommendations targeted legislative modifications.

Panel conclusion: fully compliant

ESG PART 2: EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

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.

2011 review recommendation

The Panel recommends to AEQES, in its revision of the performance indicators, that it should address in detail ESG Part 1 in the future and take a proactive role in examining the effectiveness of internal quality assurance mechanisms of programmes and higher education institutions. To this end it should initiate a discussion with the government, which is ultimately responsible for the indicators.

Evidence

According to WBF legislation, AEQES engages in only one type of external quality assurance evaluation, every ten years: evaluations applied to programme clusters.

In 2012, in accordance with ENQA's recommendations, AEQES adopted a new reference framework based on five criteria with several dimensions. Compliance with the revised ESG required minor drafting changes only (the active role for students in the governance of the institution – dimension 1.2; the appropriate use of the data needed to manage the study programmes – dimension 4.4).

The reference framework:

Criterion 1: The institution/the entity has defined, implements and maintains up-to-date a policy for maintaining the quality of its study programmes.

Dimension 1.1: The HEI's governance policy

Dimension 1.2: Quality management at HEI, entity and programme levels

Dimension 1.3: Programme development, strategic planning and periodical review

Dimension 1.4: Internal information and communication

Criterion 2: The HEI/entity has developed and implements a policy for ensuring the relevance of its study programme.

Dimension 2.1: Assessment of the study programme's relevance

Dimension 2.2: External information and communication

Criterion 3: The HEI/entity has developed and implements a policy for ensuring the internal coherence of its study programme

Dimension 3.1: Learning outcomes of the study programme

Dimension 3.2: Study programme content, learning activities and provision (including internships, projects, and final dissertations)

Dimension 3.3: Study programme's overall design and time foreseen for achieving the intended learning outcomes

Dimension 3.4: Assessment of the achievement level for the intended learning outcomes

Criterion 4: The HEI/entity has developed and implements a policy for ensuring the efficiency and equity of its study programme

Dimension 4.1: Human resources

Dimension 4.2: Material resources

Dimension 4.3: Equity in terms of student welcome, progress monitoring and support

Dimension 4.4: Analysis of data required for the programme's strategic planning

Criterion 5: The HEI/entity has completed the analysis of its study programme and has developed an action plan for continuous improvement.

Dimension 5.1: Self-evaluation methodology

Dimension 5.2: SWOT analysis

Dimension 5.3: Action plan and follow-up

The reference framework is accompanied by guidelines, which are useful for institutions drafting self-evaluation reports and for the external evaluation.

The proposed criteria are well structured and cover all standards from Part I of the ESG.

	ESG (part 1)										Number of ESG linked with the dimension
	1.1 Policy for quality assurance	1.2 Design and approval of programmes	1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification	1.5 Teaching staff	1.6 Learning resources and student support	1.7 Information management	1.8 Public information	1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance	
Key: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> : the AEQES dimension matches with the ESG											
AEQES reference framework	Criterion 1: The institution/the entity has defined, implements and keeps up-to-date a policy for supporting the quality of its study programmes.										
	Dimension 1.1: The HEI's governance policy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>									1
	Dimension 1.2: Quality management at HEI, entity and programme levels	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>							<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		2
	Dimension 1.3: Programme development, strategic planning and periodical review		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3
	Dimension 1.4 : Internal information and communication										0
	Criterion 2: The HEI/entity has developed and implements a policy for ensuring the relevance of its study programme.										
	Dimension 2.1: Assessment of the study programme's relevance		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		2
	Dimension 2.2: External information and communication		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		4
	Criterion 3: The HEI/entity has developed and implements a policy for ensuring the internal coherence of its study programme										
	Dimension 3.1: Learning outcomes of the study programme		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			4
	Dimension 3.2: Study programme content, learning activities and provision (including internships, projects, and final dissertations)		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>							2
	Dimension 3.3: Study programme's overall design and time foreseen for achieving the intended learning outcomes		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>							2
	Dimension 3.4: Assessment of the achievement level for the intended learning outcomes			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>							1
	Criterion 4: The HEI/entity has developed and implements a policy for ensuring the efficiency and equity of its study programme										
	Dimension 4.1: Human resources			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				3
	Dimension 4.2: Material resources			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				2
	Dimension 4.3: Equity in terms of student welcome, progress monitoring and support		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				4
	Dimension 4.4: Analysis of data required for the programme's strategic planning				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		3
	Criterion 5: The HEI/entity has completed the analysis of its study programme and has developed an action plan for continuous improvement.										
	Dimension 5.1: Self-evaluation methodology	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>									1
Dimension 5.2: SWOT analysis										0	
Dimension 5.3: Action plan and follow-up								<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		1	
Number of dimensions linked with the ESG	3	7	7	4	1	3	1	2	6	1	

AEQES – Self-evaluation report page

The representatives of HEIs, business environment or civil society are members of the workgroup tasked with methodological development. In this way, AEQES assures the premises for a methodological development that responds to institutional needs and also to society's needs.

The presence in each evaluation panel of one quality assurance expert who effectively follows the achievement of quality assurance processes represents an important aspect which aims to assure the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.

The AEQES has undertaken several actions to present to the stakeholders the new ESG and also, the changes in the Agency procedures and activities as reaction to the new standards:

- Presence of the representatives of HEIs, business environment or civil society in the AEQES WGs,
- Presentation at the Agency's annual seminar (the last seminar was organized in 8 May 2015),
- Different analysis.

Analysis

The Review Panel has analysed the Guide for the HEIs issued by AEQES as well as the Guide for the evaluation experts, where is clearly described the approach of the AEQES standards from the perspective of Part I of the ESG. In addition, there has been examined also some external evaluation reports found on the AEQES's web site. During the visit, the Panel requested examples of two visit schedules for two programme evaluations in order to check how the Agency has shown consistency in the evaluation processes.

The institution belonging to the German-speaking Community, evaluated by AEQES following an agreed protocol, recommended that the evaluation process should consider the legislative and cultural differences between the two communities in depth.

The following paragraphs provide a short analysis of the way how the standards of the ESG – Part I are addressed in the AEQES methodology:

1.1 Policy for quality assurance

AEQES has procedures in place to check whether higher education institutions have a policy for quality assurance. The Agency evaluates if the institution develops and implements processes and mechanisms to ensure that the study programme complies with legal requirements and takes into account the stakeholders' needs and expectations. The discussions with the representatives of HEIs (management and internal quality assurance officers) revealed that the Agency pays attention in the evaluation processes to how the HEI/entity has carried out a self-evaluation of the study programme, in a participatory, in-depth and validated manner.

1.2 Design and approval of programmes

In the evaluation process, AEQES tries not only to assess the processes and mechanisms for designing, monitoring and periodically reviewing its study programmes in the HEIs, but also focuses on how the programme's intended learning outcomes meet current or foreseeable societal needs in terms of training and personal development.

1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

According to AEQES's standards, the evaluation processes identify how the study programmes are designed and implemented in a way that is appropriate for facilitating the students in achieving the intended learning outcomes within a reasonable period of time. The HEIs resources are evaluated in the context of students' needs. The discussions during the site visit with the Agency's representatives and also with representatives of the institutions identified the fact that the students are not sufficiently involved in the institutions' activities and they do not yet have an active role in creating the learning process.

1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

The issues of admission, recognition and certification are covered by AEQES's criteria which try to identify if the institution has clear and published information about

admission, teaching, learning, evaluation and certification. AEQES analyses also if higher education institutions select, formulate and publish the programme's intended learning outcomes and checks if these are realistic, fit for purpose and communicated in an appropriate way.

1.5. *Teaching staff*

The external evaluation process evaluates if the HEI/entity ensures that the human resources are adequate and appropriate to the programme and to the students. The HEI/entity sets out the means employed to ensure appropriate staff quality and skills, with a particular focus on teaching staff. The presence of a teaching (pedagogic) expert as a member of the evaluation team is very important in approaching the consideration of this standard.

1.6. *Learning resources and student support*

AEQES evaluates human resources (*HEI ensures that the human resources are adequate and appropriate and it makes available the means needed to ensure staff quality and skills, with a particular focus on teaching staff*), material resources (*HEI ensures that the resources allocated to teaching infrastructures and tools are adequate and appropriate for achieving the intended learning outcomes.*), learning resources and student support in the programme review.

1.7. *Information management*

AEQES ensures that HEI/entity gathers/collects, analyses and makes an appropriate use of data required for the programme's strategic planning. (Dimension 4.4 of the Criterion 4 – Analysis of data required for the programmes strategic planning)

1.8 *Public information*

According to Dimension 2.2 of the Criterion 2, AEQES evaluates the external information and communication at institution / programme level. AEQES ensures that HEI/entity regularly publishes up-to-date, impartial, objective, quantitative and qualitative information on the study programmes and diplomas offered.

1.9 *On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes*

Programme evaluation considers the way that HEIs monitor the quality of their own programmes, in terms of process and result. Defining consistent follow-up procedures sustains this continuous monitoring process.

1.10 *Cyclical external quality assurance*

The HEI/entity develops and implements processes and mechanisms for designing, monitoring and periodically reviewing its study programmes.

Panel commendations

The Review Panel commends the manner in which AEQES has reacted to the recommendations of the 2011 evaluation process by ENQA and the revised ESG. Therefore, the Panel considers that AEQES has developed strong standards and criteria that have enabled the Agency to engage in consistent and coherent activities.

Panel conclusion: fully 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.

2011 review recommendation

In addressing the issue of performance indicators, AEQES must ensure that they are operational and ensure consistency in evaluations.

The review panel recommends AEQES to intensify its communication toward the students about quality assurance.

Evidence

AEQES designs and implements its quality assurance processes within the framework of the national legislation: Decree of 22 February 2008 (with subsequent changes). According to the legislative framework, the Agency is responsible for the evaluation of higher education 120 ECTS diplomas, bachelor's and master's degrees delivered by the four types of HEIs (universities, university colleges, art colleges and adult vocational education institutions).

These external evaluations do not have any accreditation value or any formal impact on the authorizations granted to the institutions to operate their activities.

A large part of the Agency's methodology is based on Decree of 22 February 2008, but throughout 10 years of activities, AEQES has developed various additional tools and procedures to provide more support to the development of internal quality assurance. At the same time, the Agency was very active in informing the Government about the international challenges in the field, about the new AEQES's challenges and need for improvements. AEQES immediately reacted after the first ENQA evaluation and submitted to policymakers its wish to be able to consider methodological improvements for external evaluations in a more autonomous and concerted manner (see: Position paper on the legal changes needed to improve the Agency's functioning (2012) and Memorandum (2013). The Agency developed new approaches and in 2012, in line with ENQA's recommendations, AEQES adopted a new reference framework based on five criteria with several dimensions. The new ESG required the introduction of minor drafting changes (the active role for students in the governance of the institution – dimension 1.2; the appropriate use of the data needed to manage the study programmes – dimension 4.4).

The key stakeholders (representatives of HE institutions, policymakers, representatives of the labour market and students) are involved in the methodological changes as members in the Steering Committee, the AEQES's nine Working Groups or in the evaluation panels. AEQES recognized that the students' involvement in the Agency's activities (other than participation in the expert panels) could be improved. AEQES surveys the institutions, students and experts after each programme evaluation, to see how the added value of the evaluation is perceived, leading to adjustment of some of its processes as and where necessary.

All thematic analyses conducted by AEQES have aimed at the improvement of its own methodologies and processes in order to meet the expectations of a wider category of stakeholders: to drive the development of improved quality assurance approaches in the institutions, to identify the student needs in the teaching, learning and evaluation processes in order to recommend the best solutions, to increase the link between the educational processes and the requirements of society and labour market, etc.

The format of the training seminar for experts (before the evaluation visits start) was improved to better prepare the experts for their mission and in this way to assure the achievement of the aims and objectives of the evaluation process.

Analysis

The Panel found evidence that the external evaluations carried out by AEQES are aimed at enhancing the quality of education and at creating a quality culture in the HEI. AEQES tries to achieve this by identifying best practices in quality assurance, by answering all new challenges at international or national level and by informing the public. The Panel noted some major changes in the external evaluation process: the new reference framework, the new follow-up procedures, the students' involvement in the evaluation panels. All these changes have greatly improved the Agency's work.

The reference framework is accompanied by guidelines, which are useful for drafting self-evaluation reports and for the external evaluation process. The guidelines are useful additional instruments to ensure the consistency of the external evaluation processes. The reference framework itself has been developed recently by the Agency, following a wide consultation with key stakeholders. The Agency plans to keep the framework under review and to amend it, where it might be necessary. To date, those interviewed by the Panel expressed satisfaction with and approval of the framework.

The HEIs representatives interviewed during the site visit expressed their appreciation of the way the Agency managed the external evaluation activities, the results of which are considered genuinely useful in improving the educational processes. Some concerns were expressed about the large number of external evaluations conducted of an institution's programmes, due to the fact that each programme is individually evaluated. Some suggestions were made that perhaps evaluations could be conducted at institutional level instead of programme level and that consideration of this possibility is a challenge for the Agency going forward.

Taking into account the different profiles of the Steering Committee members - different HEIs representatives, academic, administrative, ministry, business, cultural and social entities, etc., together with evaluation panels - academic, students, QA experts, teaching experts, the Panel considers the involvement of stakeholders as consistent in designing the processes and methodologies.

During the visit the Panel identified a broad appreciation by relevant stakeholders of the efforts of the Agency to interact with higher education institutions and other types of stakeholders. The students seem to continue to be insufficiently involved in internal or external quality assurance activities. The student organizations expressed the need to be better supported by the Agency or other bodies in implementing the "quality culture" vision as part of students' interests.

Panel recommendations

The Panel recommends that the Agency should continue the process of involving students in its activities, and in cooperation with the relevant student organisations, support the capacity building of student experts in quality assurance.

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

2011 review recommendation

The Review Panel recommends however, that, taking the ESG as its basis, AEQES should arrive at setting standards for quality, against which evaluations could take place. This would aid experts in their judgments, and make them more transparent and consistent by defining what it considers quality, without necessarily having to draw conclusions of non-compliance that it, and the external community, could see as a threat to the quality enhancement approach.

The panel recommends that AEQES, in consultation with the councils and ministry, develop a more substantial follow-up process in order to assure ongoing quality assurance in the system.

The panel repeats its recommendation that AEQES include students in its expert panels.

The panel repeats its recommendation in this context to publish the Quality Handbook and the guidelines for experts and for institutions in English.

Evidence

According to the WBF legislation the evaluation of programmes is conducted once every 10 years with a mid-term follow-up evaluation.

The evaluation consists of three phases:

1. The self-evaluation (preparation);
2. The external evaluation, carried out with the contribution of a panel of independent experts selected by the Agency. This step includes in particular a site visit and the publication of reports drafted by the experts:
 - Appointment of panel;
 - Preparatory meeting with HEI;
 - Site visit;
 - Preliminary report;
 - Response from the academic authorities;
 - Final evaluation report published;
 - System-wide analysis published.
3. The publication of an action plan drawn up and implemented by the institution (follow-up).

The phases of the evaluation process are clearly described in the Guide for HEIs and also in the Guide for external experts. Both documents are published on the Agency's web-site in French and English.

Before each evaluation, the Executive Unit organizes a one-and-a-half day of training for the panel of experts, and the Agency appoints an Executive Unit staff member to serve as Technical Secretary of review panels (with voice but no right to vote), aiming to ensure a systematic and consistent application of the evaluation criteria and providing technical support.

By submitting questionnaires after each evaluation process to experts, representatives of the evaluated institution and students, AEQES permanently monitors its own activity.

In 2015 AEQES reinforced its external follow-up evaluation mechanism. The mechanism adopted by AEQES in 2015 foresees that the institutions are to publish an action plan on their website, at least on two occasions (after the evaluation and after the follow-up evaluation).

The general evaluation scheme for follow-up consists in:

- Progress report
- Appointment of panel
- Follow up visit
- Preliminary follow-up report
- Response from the academic authorities
- Final follow-up report
- Updated action plan

Analysis

The Review Panel is able to confirm that the evaluation methodology employed by AEQES for programme evaluations corresponds to the self-evaluation/site visit/draft report/published report/follow-up model of review. The appeal procedure is not presented (in SAR) as possible step in the evaluation process, but it is clearly described, published and known by the experts and the institution representatives. The evaluation procedures are detailed in different guides (Guide for HEIs, Guide for external experts).

The follow-up procedures were implemented in 2013 and in 2015 AEQES reinforced its external follow-up evaluation mechanism providing the responsibility for institutions to publish an action plan on their website, on at least two occasions (after the full formal evaluation and after the follow-up evaluation). The stakeholders interviewed appreciated the design and the aim of the follow-up procedure which continues the evaluation process in a consistent way.

AEQES always analyses the quality of its work by submitting questionnaires after each evaluation process to experts, representatives of the evaluated institution and students. The results of questionnaires are analysed in the “Results of surveys of institutions, students and experts” and they represent the support for strategic improvement of the Agency’s activities.

Panel commendations

The Panel commends the Agency for the reinforcement of mid-term follow-up evaluations (mandatory for all programme evaluations mid-way between two full evaluations).

Panel conclusion: fully 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).

2011 review recommendation

The Review Panel recommends that AEQES intensifies its communication with students on quality assurance and that students continue to be included in all its expert panels.

Evidence

For the last number of years, selecting and training evaluation experts as well as the possibilities for involving students in evaluation activities have been regarded as priorities for AEQES. Therefore, commencing in 2013, all panels include a student member.

In order to identify future experts, AEQES uses the following approaches:

- Letter sent to ARES to obtain a list of a large number of names of potential experts for each programme to be evaluated;
- Publication of information on the AEQES website aimed at encouraging spontaneous applications;
- Information and consultation of diverse Belgian and international organisations aimed at collecting additional applications;
- Consultation of the database of experts who have already carried out external evaluation missions for AEQES.

Each candidate is contacted by the Executive Unit and asked to submit a CV and to complete an applicant expert identification form which contains a declaration of independence. The applications received are approved by the Experts Working Group and they are included in the AEQES database of experts.

Each panel is coordinated by a chair (and possible several co-chairs for cluster evaluations) and the Agency appoints an Executive Unit staff member to serve as Technical Secretary of review panels (with a voice but no right to vote), aimed at ensuring a systematic and consistent application of the evaluation criteria and providing technical support.

The expert panels normally have the following membership profile:

- peer expert (experience in teaching the evaluated field)
- expert from the profession
- education expert (experience in the field of higher education and pedagogy)
- expert in quality assurance
- student expert (since 2013)
- chair of the panel (one of the aforementioned areas, apart from the student expert)

Prior to the site-visit, the Executive Unit organizes a one-and-a-half day of training (minimum) for panel experts in order to familiarize experts with the AEQES tools, to discuss procedures, rights and responsibilities. The format of the training seminar for experts (before the evaluation visits start) has been improved in order to better prepare the experts for their mission and in this way assure the achievement of the aims and objectives of the evaluation process. The seminars were improved by: extension of duration of the seminar (from one day to one day and a half), invitation of guest speakers to contribute to the methodological workshops and closer attention to the appropriation of the reference framework.

The follow-up evaluation panel is composed of two experts.

One of these is a peer expert and/or an expert from the profession. The other one is an education and/or quality assurance expert. One of the experts will have taken part in the first evaluation of the programme, so that the follow-up evaluation can benefit from the continuity between the two evaluations as well as from new contributions.

Analysis

According to the documents presented to the Review Panel, the activities undertaken and discussions held during the site-visit, AEQES pays significant attention to the selection and training of its experts. The Agency's representatives have underlined that the peer-review experts represent the key-element for reviews to be carried out in a reliable and consistent manner and protocols to be applied correctly and with the impartiality required.

AEQES has a database of experts which includes about 600 persons with different profiles from different countries and regions (62% of external evaluators appointed do not reside in the WBF). The panel members have different profiles: peer experts, experts from the profession, education experts, experts in quality assurance, student experts. The Review Panel noted that the Agency has paid particular attention to the participation of students (involvement); they are now members in all the evaluation teams. The Steering Committee has decided that the follow-up panels will include an additional student member, but for the moment students are not involved in the follow-up procedure. Moreover, the Panel considers that the presence of an "education expert" as part of the evaluation team brings balance to the evaluation process and also, offers more depth in approaching certain standards.

The Panel considers that the Agency operates independently in terms of nomination and appointment of experts. In order to assure the independence of the evaluation process, before each evaluation, the experts have to sign a "no-conflict of interest" declaration, part of the Code of Ethics.

AEQES also provides a diverse set of training and support tools and materials to reviewers, such as informative materials and guides with recommendations to produce reports and for site visits: (Guide for expert committee members, trainings before each evaluation, one staff member present in each evaluation etc.).

The panel appreciated the complexity of the *Guide for expert committee members* which offers a large variety of information:

- Quality assessment and the European context
- The establishment of the Agency in the French Community of Belgium

THE AGENCY'S MISSIONS

METHODOLOGY USED IN THE FRENCH COMMUNITY

1. General principles
 - a. The 10-year plan and how assessment takes place
 - b. Objectives and scope of the quality assessment
 - c. The two-stage assessment
 - d. Publication of assessment results
 - e. Follow-up procedures
2. The external assessment: objectives and expectations
3. Ethical principles
4. How an assessment takes place
 - a. Before the visit
 - i. Selection of the expert committee
 - ii. Constitution of the expert committee
 - iii. Preparation and organisation of site visits
 - b. During the site visit
 - c. After the site visit
 - i. Compilation, approval and dissemination of the reports

5. Roles and responsibilities
 - a. Responsibilities of the Agency
 - b. Responsibilities of the expert committee
 - c. Responsibilities of the expert committee's chairman
 - d. Missions of the Agency's Executive Office

Panel commendations

The Panel commends the Agency for the diversity of profiles in experts used in evaluation profiles. The presence of an “education expert” in the evaluation team brings balance to the evaluation process and enables a panel to conduct a more in-depth evaluation when considering certain standards.

Panel recommendations

The Review Panel recommends that AEQES would benefit from involving students in the follow-up evaluation process and panels. In this way, AEQES would further ensure the continuity of the evaluation process in a consistent manner.

Panel conclusion: fully compliant

ESG 2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES

Standard:

Any outcomes or judgments 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

The AEQES’s evaluations do not lead to any formal decision, but are assessments and make recommendations for improvement. The criteria used by AEQES in its external review processes were reviewed in 2010 – 2012 focussing on new challenges in the evaluation process and ENQA’s recommendations, together with clarifying some aspects, including definition of criteria, arrangement in dimensions and sub-dimensions etc. The new criteria are supported by specific Guidelines: one for HEIs and one for evaluators. The Guidelines ensure an appropriate level of knowledge and a common understanding of the reference framework for consistent interpretation and application. The criteria and Guidelines are published on the AEQES website. Some other mechanisms in the evaluation processes are implemented to ensure that the reference framework is applied in a consistent manner by the experts: all visits for the same programme or cluster are carried out by one panel of experts, each programme evaluation has a reference person within the Executive Unit, the entire external evaluation process is supervised by a chair or several co-chairs, with the continuous support of the Executive Unit, the expert training seminar and the same template applied to all external evaluations reports.

Analysis

The Review Panel considers that AEQES has explicit criteria, detailed in specific Guidelines which are public and easily accessible to stakeholders. The interviews confirmed that both representatives of institutions and evaluators have appreciated the criteria, the quality of the guides as well as the support received from the Executive Unit during the evaluation process. They have also specified that the Agency has disseminated information on criteria and procedures on certain occasions e.g. conferences, working groups, trainings, etc. The interviewed persons also expressed their appreciation of the quality of external evaluation reports and especially the recommendations which provide a real support for improvement.

The representatives of the German-speaking Community would like the experts to be briefed more thoroughly on the legislative specific of the Community they are part of, and the assessment to be found in analyzing criteria in a more specific way.

All experts are trained at the beginning of each evaluation process. Based on the self-evaluation report, documentary evidence and interviews with representatives of professional associations, students, teaching staff and the HEI management, the external evaluation panels write a report which has to respect a common structure, established by the Agency, with clear recommendations for each standard. The analysis of the external evaluation reports revealed a consistent interpretation of criteria.

The Panel considers that the practice of developing meta-analyses has contributed to the improvement of the activities of the Agency in ensuring the consistency of the judgments in the evaluation process. The quantitative data (questionnaires) supplemented with qualitative data (results of the external evaluation processes) offered the Agency the possibility of analysing the impact of the evaluation processes, of regularly focusing on the recurrent problems observed, and explicitly inviting the policymakers to proceed to legal adjustments as, and where, necessary.

Panel recommendations

The Panel recommends that AEQES should pay more attention to the training of experts involved in the evaluation process in the German-speaking community.

Panel conclusion: fully 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.

2011 review recommendation

The Review Panel recommends that, in concordance with its stepped up communication toward students as recommended in the previous section, AEQES consider producing separate, perhaps summary, reports addressed to students.

Evidence

The external evaluation reports follow the structure of the reference framework (which is published): the experts describe items considered for each dimension of the reference framework, analyse them, and make recommendations.

The report is the responsibility of the experts' panel: the chair proposes a draft evaluation report and this is commented and improved by experts who took part in the visit. The Executive Unit staff member ensures that the criteria and dimensions of the reference framework are respected and commented on. After the panel has unanimously agreed on the report, a draft version is sent to the evaluated institution for review and annotations. After this step, the final report is published on the Agency's web page. It was noted that the Steering Committee has no authority to alter the content of the report. All reports are loaded on the Agency's web site and thus can be easily accessed by everyone interested.

The system-wide analysis report has three main chapters: Foreword (written by Executive Unit), State of the art (written by the expert panel) and the Analytical note (written by the Steering Committee).

For the part of the system-wide analysis, the experts are required, among some specific points, to write a global and transversal report. After the experts have finalized their report, the AEQES Steering Committee highlights some aspects and presents the Agency's opinion on the evaluation conclusions. The follow-up evaluation reports are also the responsibility of the experts' panel. They contain a description of the implementation of the institution's plan of action in recent years and recommendations to support the development of a quality culture.

All reports are published on the AEQES website. AEQES systematically sends paper copies of the system-wide analyses to ARES, to the Ministers who have higher education in their remit, to any Minister concerned by the issues at stake (culture, health, etc.), the professional associations concerned, to parliamentary commissions related to HE, student unions, *the Service d'Information sur les Études et les Professions* (SIEP) [Information Service on Studies and Professions], and to the Administration of the WBF. AEQES monitors reactions to the published report, with selections of these reactions being published on the Agency's web site.

Analysis

The Panel had access on the Agency's web site to all selected reports presented by AEQES as a result of its activity during the preceding years. These reports are published in an accessible manner making them easy sourced by those interested. The reports comply with the standard template provided by the Agency and recommendations are supported by evidence and analysis. The Panel did not identify any significant differences across the reports, whether in terms of evidence or analysis.

The ENQA Panel heard, in its interviews with all stakeholders, that reports are evidence-based: the findings of the expert panels and their subsequent conclusions are supported by what is learned from the self-evaluation reports, additional background information and the interviews during the site visit. The Panel considers that all experts are appropriately involved in producing the report. The interviewed AEQES experts appreciated that the expert committee works as a team, each member has clear responsibilities established at the beginning of the external evaluation process. The experts appreciated the presence in the panel of a staff member from the Executive Office of the Agency. They consider that the Agency staff assure more objectivity in the external evaluation process. With a wide experience, the staff support the chair to ensure that all members of the panel had the opportunity to express their point of view and also that all higher education institutions are treated equally.

Even though the dissemination efforts by the Agency are well appreciated by stakeholders, some of those interviewed, notably students and business representatives, consider that the development of summary reports would be useful, arguing they do not have time to read or they find it difficult to understand complex and professional reports. In the SAR it is stated that few students read the reports published by AEQES. The Panel considers that the reports are written in an accessible manner, with final conclusions easily understandable by a large category of stakeholders, but it supports the requirements of students and business representatives who would appreciate receiving a shorter report with the principal conclusions and recommendations.

Panel recommendations

The Panel recommends that the Agency reconsiders the implementation of the proposal made by the ENQA Review Panel in 2011 concerning the issuing of summary reports on the evaluations that are easier to read and understood by non-professionals.

Panel conclusion: fully 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

The legislative framework of AEQES did not include any appeal structure. However in January 2016 AEQES established the Complaints Management Commission and adopted a formal procedure for appeals against the findings of its evaluations or for non-compliances with the Code of Ethics. The procedure for appeal is published on the AEQES website and communicated to institutions at the beginning of each external evaluation process.

The Commission is composed of three members: one is appointed by the complaining institution, one by Steering Committee of AEQES and one is proposed by both. The Commission is approved by the Steering Committee and a member of the Executive Unit serves as secretary.

Resolving an appeal first involves a mediation procedure and, if the mediation process is not successful in resolving the disputed issues, the Complaints Management Commission is assigned to hear and decide on the appeal.

Two complaints have been lodged since 2008, and they were addressed through mediation.

Analysis

The Panel considers that AEQES has clearly defined complaints and appeal process and that they are communicated in different ways to institutions whose programmes have undergone an evaluation.

Complaints are admissible if the following conditions are simultaneously met: they concern non-compliance with the Code of Ethics, with an evaluation procedure, and/or with the expert contract, they are lodged in writing within 30 calendar days following the object of the complaint, they are based on facts and are documented, they are signed by the highest authority of the institution, they pertain to an element identified in the evaluation procedure. Resolving an appeal means first mediation between AEQES and institution and only if the mediation process is not successful, it is nominated the Complaints Management Commission which is composed of three members: one is appointed by the complaining institution, one by Steering Committee of AEQES and one is proposed by both. The Complaints Management Commission is approved by the Steering Committee.

The procedure is not considered part of the evaluation process and all references in the SAR on the external evaluation process stages do not include the complaints and appeals processes.

The procedure is detailed in the Quality Handbook, but the Panel found some inconsistency between the English and French versions. Discussions during the site visit revealed that it was merely the translation of this document that is faulty, and all representatives of HEIs who were interviewed confirmed that they are aware of the procedures, but they would not consider using them because of the lack of a formal impact resulting as a consequence of the evaluations.

Panel recommendations

The Panel recommends that AEQES considers the complaints and appeals procedures as part of the evaluation process.

Furthermore the Panel recommends that the Agency pays attention to updating the English versions of documents on the web-site so that they are correct and align with the documents published in French.

Panel conclusion: fully compliant

ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

After analysing the activities conducted by the Agency, the Panel considers that the Agency has examples of good practices in many aspects. While employing a well-defined strategy for its activities and with a qualified and dedicated staff that is visible at local and international levels, the Agency faces financial difficulties in assuring its sustainability for the next five years. Noting that the discussions with policy-makers were not successful in increasing the budget allocated to the Agency, the Panel suggests the Agency should consider implementing a change of the level of its evaluation processes. Switching from individual programme evaluation to institutional evaluation may be a less costly solution and one the decision-makers could consider adopting.

Highly commending the system-wide analyses and meta analyses conducted and published by AEQES, the Panel considers that these could offer a complete picture of the HE system in WBF, if the subject of “doctoral schools” would be included. Consequently, the Panel suggests that AEQES should initiate discussions on the possibility of including evaluations of doctoral schools in relevant institutions with relevant stakeholders.

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY OF COMMENDATIONS

3.1.

The Panel commends the Agency for the consistency and transparency of its works and activities, including the preparation of the Strategic Plan (2016 - 2020) following a wide consultation of the sector.

3.2.

The Panel appreciates the international visibility of the Agency in recent years.

3.3.

The Panel commends the Agency for the large number of experts included in evaluation panels who not reside in the WBF (62% of the total number of experts employed). This ensures the results of the evaluation processes are more transparent and more reliable and consistent.

3.4.

The Panel commends AEQES for its transversal analyses which are very complex, analysing in depth the situation of HE in WBF.

3.6.

The Panel gives credit to AEQES for the way it adapts, has a well-structured formal system for obtaining information concerning the quality of its own activities and, as the interviewees have confirmed during the site visit, the way it responds. AEQES knows how to listen, has an open-minded behaviour and is very dynamic.

2.1.

The Review Panel commends the manner in which AEQES has reacted to the recommendations of the 2011 evaluation process by ENQA and the revised ESG. Therefore, the Panel considers AEQES has developed strong standards and criteria that have enabled the Agency to engage in consistent and coherent activities.

2.3.

The Panel commends the Agency for the reinforcement of mid-term follow-up evaluations (mandatory for all programme evaluations mid-way between two full evaluations).

2.4.

The Panel commends the Agency for the diversity of profiles in experts used in evaluation profiles. The presence of an “education expert” in the evaluation team brings balance to the evaluation process and enables a panel to conduct a more in-depth evaluation when considering certain standards.

OVERVIEW OF JUDGMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1.

The recommendation on the length of time between full programme evaluations made by the panel who conducted the ENQA review in 2011 remains valid and the Agency should continue the negotiations with the Government in shortening the 10-year time interval between two external evaluations.

The Panel recommends to AEQES to continue supporting students and promoting quality assurance among students, in cooperation with the relevant student organisations.

3.3.

The Panel recommends that the Agency defines, in a clearer way than at present, the role of the Steering Committee in the description of the evaluation process, and in particular places emphasis on the approval process (**without any interference by the SC**) of the external evaluation reports.

3.4.

The Review Panel recommends that the Agency further enhances the dissemination process of its thematic analyses in such a manner that the analyses become a useful tool for all interested stakeholders. Furthermore, the Panel considers that it will be useful for AEQES to further develop its communication strategy and its management data system.

3.5.

The Panel recommends that the Agency continues its discussions with policy-makers on its financial situation, in order to ensure the continuation of its activities while maintaining the same level of responsibility and quality standards.

2.2.

The Panel recommends that the Agency should continue the process of involving students in its activities, and in cooperation with the relevant student organisations, support the capacity building of student experts in quality assurance.

2.4.

The Review Panel recommends that AEQES would benefit from involving students in the follow-up evaluation process and panels. In this way, AEQES would further ensure the continuity of the evaluation process in a consistent manner.

2.5.

The Panel recommends that AEQES should pay more attention to the training of experts involved in the evaluation process in the German-speaking community.

2.6.

The Panel recommends that the Agency reconsiders the implementation of the proposal made by the ENQA Review Panel in 2011 concerning the issuing of summary reports on the evaluations that are easier to read and understood by non-professionals.

2.7.

The Panel recommends that AEQES considers the complaints and appeals procedures as part of the evaluation process.

Furthermore the Panel recommends that the Agency pays attention to updating the English versions of documents on the web-site so that they are correct and align with the documents published in French.

In light of the documentary and oral evidence considered prior to and during the site visit, the Review Panel is satisfied that, in the performance of its functions, AEQES is in compliance with the revised ESG.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

September 4, Sunday			
Time	Activity	Participants	Venue
	Arrival at Brussels, accommodation		
16.00-19.00	The first meeting of the External Review Panel members	External Review Panel	Hotel
September 5, Monday			
Time	Activity	Participants	Venue
09:00	Arrival at AEQES		
09:15-10:15	Meeting with head of agency	DUYKAERTS Caty , director of the Executive Unit HEINEN Elfriede , former vice-chairwoman (2014-2016) LEPOIVRE Philippe , former chairman (2014-2016) MATHELIN Catherine , vice-chairwoman PARMENTIER Philippe , chairman	AEQES offices Boulevard Léopold II, 44 B-1080 Brussels meeting room 3E305
10:15-10:25	<i>External review panel discussion</i>	External Review Panel	
10:25-11:25	Meeting with the self-evaluation (SE) WG and the Methodological developments (MD) WG	AELTERMAN Guy , external advisor, member of the MD WG AUBERT Angeline , member of the Steering Committee, member of the MD WG and of the SE WG DUYKAERTS Caty , director of the Executive Unit, member of the MD WG and of the SE WG HEINEN Elfriede , former vice-chairwoman, member of the MD WG and of the SE WG LEPOIVRE Philippe , former chairman, member of the MD WG and of the SE WG MAES Danielle , member of the Steering Committee, member of the MD WG and of the SE WG SURSOCK Andrée , former member of the Steering Committee, member of the MD WG and of the SE WG WERTZ Vincent , former member of the Steering Committee, former vice-chairman (2010-2014), member of the MD WG ZHANG Thérèse , evaluation manager in the Executive Unit, member of the MD WG	
11:25-11:35	<i>External review panel discussion</i>	External Review Panel	
11:35-12:35	Meeting with the Executive Unit staff	COLLE Julien , evaluation manager JAROSZEWSKI Eva , evaluation manager MARION Michaël , assistant NURTANTIO Yoneko , evaluation manager SALLETS Joëlle , evaluation manager VAN OUYTSEL Audrey , evaluation manager ZHANG Thérèse , evaluation manager	
12:35-13:35	<i>Lunch in premises</i>	External Review Panel	
13:35-14:05	<i>External review panel discussion and consultation of documents</i>	External Review Panel	

14:05-15:05	Meeting with agency working groups (Methodology & strategy [M&S] WG, 10-year plan WG [10YP], reports [REP] WG, experts [EXP] WG, communication [COM] WG)	BELLAL Selma , member of the Steering Committee, member of the M&S WG BOUCHEZ Arielle , external advisor, member of the EXP WG CANTER Sandrine , member of the Steering Committee, member of the EXP WG JAROSZEWSKI Eva , evaluation manager in the Executive Unit, member and secretary of EXP WG and 10YP WG PIERRE Carine , member of the Steering Committee, member of the EXP WG SALLETS Joëlle , evaluation manager in the Executive Unit, member and secretary of M&S WG and REP WG SURSOCK Andrée , member of the Steering Committee, member of the M&S WG	
15:05-15:15	<i>External review panel discussion</i>	External Review Panel	
15:15-16:15	Meeting with Heads of HEIs	DUFRANE Denis , head director of Haute Ecole en Hainau (university college) FIEVET Marc , director of École supérieure des affaires (adult vocational education) LEMAITRE Anne , dean of the Sciences Faculty of Namur University PIETTE Alain , dean of the Translation and Interpretation Faculty of Mons University	
16:15-18:00	External review panel discussion	External Review Panel	
September 6, Tuesday			
Time	Activity	Participants	Venue
09:00	Arrival at AEQES		
09:15-10:15	Meeting with HEIs quality coordinators	COLINET Benjamin , quality officer, Haute école Louvain en Hainaut (university college) NIX Stéphanie , quality officer, Autonome Hochschule in der DG (university college, German-speaking Community of Belgium) SALMON Maryline , quality officer Haute école Robert Shuman (university college) TEMPELS Linda , quality officer, Louvain University VANDAMME Mathilde , quality officer, Institut supérieur de formation continue d'Etterbeek (adult vocational education) THEWISSEN Dominique , quality officer, Liège University	AEQES offices (meeting room 3E305)
10:15-10:25	<i>External review panel discussion</i>	External Review Panel	
10:25-11:25	Meeting with students	BRUYNSEELS Barbara , student in Nursing, Autonome Hochschule in der DG (university college, German-speaking Community of Belgium) ELSEN Joe , student in Philosophy, Louvain University FAUFRA Catherine , student in Industrial Engineering, Haute école libre mosane (university college)	
11:25-11:35	<i>External review panel discussion</i>	External Review Panel	
11:35-12:35	Meeting with ARES representatives	COIGNOUL Freddy , chairman of Commission for Quality of Education and Research (CoQER) FERY Isabelle , director of Academic Affairs GUILLAUME Kevin , director of International Relations	
12:35-13:35	<i>Lunch on premises</i>	External Review Panel	
13:35-14:05	Meeting with government and ministries representatives	GENOT Pascale (Toni PELOSATO) representing the Minister of Higher education ISAAC Hans for the Minister of Adult vocational education KAUFMANN Chantal , Director of the Department of Non- Compulsory Education and Scientific Research (Ministry of WBF) WEERTS Mathieu , responsible for financial monitoring for the Ministry of WBF STOLZ François-Gérard , Deputy director for the adult vocational education (Ministry of WBF)	

14:05-14:45	<i>External review panel discussion</i>	External Review Panel	
14:45-14:55	<i>External review panel discussion</i>	External Review Panel	
14:55-15:25	Meeting with AEQES' evaluation partners	MESSAS Linda , general manager at MusiQuE and AEC PRCHAL Martin , chairman of MusiQuE RIVIERE Delphin , Board member of the Commission des Titres d'ingénieurs (CTI)	
15:25-15:35	<i>External review panel discussion</i>	External Review Panel	
15:35-16:35	Meeting with experts	COURARD Luc , peer-reviewer (bachelor in Building) and chairman (Industrial engineering) JOURQUIN Bart , peer-reviewer and expert in quality assurance, chairman of several panels of experts, expert for follow-up evaluations PIRONET Fabienne , expert in quality assurance, expert and chairwoman of several panels of experts MUHIRE Jean-Michel , student expert (bachelors and masters in Psychology and Education) SAVIDAN Patrick , chairman (Philosophy) VLIEGHE François , expert from the profession (Industrial engineering)	
16:35-16:45	<i>External review panel discussion</i>	External Review Panel	
16:45-17:45	Meeting with employers	BIOT Loïc , spokesperson of Electrabel FARAG Laurent , speech and language therapist GODEFROID Jean-Marie , marketing manager at Belfius JACOBS Colette , member of the employer's association of care institutions PEPIN Stephane , physicist at the federal agency for nuclear control POSKIN Hervé-Jacques , director of the Walloon green building cluster	
17:45-18:45	<i>External review panel discussion</i>	External Review Panel	
September 7, Wednesday			
Time	Activity	Participants	Venue
09:00	Arrival at AEQES		AEQES offices (meeting room 3E305)
09:15-10:15	Specific meeting for clarification, if necessary	DUYKAERTS Caty , director of the Executive Unit	
10:15-12:30	<i>External review panel discussion</i>	External Review Panel	
12:30-13:30	<i>Lunch on premises</i>	External Review Panel	
13:30-14:00	Meeting with AEQES representatives to present preliminary findings		

ANNEX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE REVIEW

External review of the Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (AEQES) by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

Background and Context

AEQES is an independent public sector agency, practising formative evaluation based on a dialogue between all stakeholders within the French Community. Fully embedded in the European context, the Agency is responsible for assessing the quality of higher education and working for its continuous improvement.

The Agency autonomously develops its procedures used for assessing the quality of teaching in bachelor and master programmes in the institutions authorised by the French Community. It establishes an evaluation-plan on a 10-year basis, monitoring an appropriate group of programmes with the aim of fostering the alignment of programme profiles and objectives with the missions of the institutions involved, disseminating good practice and promoting synergies.

The Agency organises evaluation and follow-up procedures in line with its code of ethics. It selects its experts, informs them of their mission and its context and ensures that they can carry out their work in complete independence.

The Agency provides information on the quality of higher education by publishing on its website the review reports, the system-wide analyses and the follow-up action plans, and highlighting best practice. It provides the heads of the institutions reviewed and the Government with proposals on ways of enhancing quality.

The Agency, through its broad-based participative structure, remains in permanent dialogue with stakeholders. It takes any initiative deemed fit for accomplishing its duties, updating its procedures on the basis of experience gained. Its participation in international bodies and events for quality assurance in higher education are also to be seen in the context of the Agency as a learning organisation.

By basing all its working procedures on the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), by working together with other agencies or bodies in other countries, and by disseminating information on European developments in higher education, the Agency can be seen as being a part of an overall European process.

AEQES has been a full member of ENQA since 2011 and is applying for renewal of ENQA membership.

AEQES has been registered on EQAR since 2012 and is applying for renewal.

2. Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

This review, will evaluate the way in which and to what extent AEQES 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 AEQES should be reconfirmed and to EQAR to support AEQES' application to the register.

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

2.1 Activities of AEQES within the scope of the ESG

In order for AEQES to apply for ENQA membership and for registration in EQAR, this review will analyse all activities of AEQES 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 AEQES have to be addressed in the external review:

External evaluations of programmes (including follow-up evaluations)

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 AEQES including the preparation of a self-assessment report;
- A site visit by the review panel to AEQES;
- 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. Two of the reviewers are nominated by the ENQA Board on the basis of proposals submitted to ENQA by the member national agencies. The third external reviewer is drawn from a nomination provided by the European University Association (EUA) or the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE). The nomination of the student member comes from the European Students' Union (ESU).

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 AEQES 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 the AEQES review.

3.2 Self-assessment by AEQES, including the preparation of a self-assessment report

AEQES 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 AEQES 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 ENQA Guidelines for External Review of Quality Assurance Agencies, 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

AEQES 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 AEQES at least one month before the site visit, in order to properly organise the requested interviews.

The review panel will be assisted by AEQES in arriving in Brussels, Belgium.

The site visit will close with an oral presentation and discussion of the major issues of the evaluation between the review panel and AEQES.

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 AEQES within 11 weeks of the site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If AEQES 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 AEQES, finalise the document and submit it to AEQES and 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.

AEQES is also requested to provide a letter addressed to the ENQA Board outlining its motivation applying for membership and the ways in which AEQES 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

AEQES 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. AEQES 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 AEQES. 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 AEQES 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 AEQES and ENQA and until it is approved by the Board the report may not be used or relied upon by AEQES, the panel and any third party and may not be disclosed without the prior written consent of ENQA. AEQES 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

AEQES 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 (including follow-up visit)	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, AEQES 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 AEQES 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	November 2015
Appointment of review panel members	December 2015
Self-assessment completed	April 2016
Pre-screening of SER by ENQA coordinator	May 2016
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	June 2016
Briefing of review panel members	July 2016
Review panel site visit	September 2016
Draft of evaluation report and submitting it to ENQA coordinator for pre-screening	November 2016
Draft of evaluation report to AEQES	December 2016
Statement of AEQES to review panel if necessary	December 2016
Submission of final report to ENQA	January 2017
Consideration of the report by ENQA Board and response of AEQES	February 2017
Publication of report	March 2017

ANNEX 3: GLOSSARY

AAQ	Swiss agency of accreditation and quality assurance
AEQES	Agence pour l'évaluation de la qualité de l'enseignement supérieur organisé ou subventionné par la Communauté française [Agency for the evaluation of quality in higher education organised or subsidised by the French-speaking Community]
ANAQ-Sup	Autorité nationale d'Assurance Qualité de l'Enseignement supérieur (Sénégal) [National Authority of Quality Assurance in Higher Education]
ARES	Académie de Recherche et d'Enseignement Supérieur
CEEC	Commission d'Évaluation de l'Enseignement collégial (Québec) [Commission for the Evaluation of Higher Education]
CoQER	Commission pour la qualité de l'enseignement et de la recherche
CReF	Conseil des Recteurs des Universités francophones de Belgique [Board of University Rectors]
CTI	Commission des Titres d'Ingénieurs [Engineering Education Commission]
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EQAF	European Quality Assurance Forum
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
ESG	Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area
ESU	European Students' Union
FrAQ-Sup	Réseau francophone des agences qualité
HCERES	Haut Conseil de l'Évaluation de la Recherche et de l'Enseignement supérieur [High Council for the Evaluation of Education and Research]
HE	Higher Education
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
IEP	Institutional Evaluation Programme
MusiQuE	Music Quality Enhancement
NVAO	Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders
QA	Quality assurance
QF	Qualifications Framework
SC	Steering Committee
SIEP	Service d'information sur les études et les professions [Information Service on Studies and Professions]
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
WBF	Wallonia-Brussels Federation
WG	Working group

ANNEX 4. DOCUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE REVIEW

DOCUMENTS PROVIDED BY AEQES

- Self-evaluation Report (Eng.)
- Annexes (Eng.):
 - o Recommendations made by the ENQA experts and board following the review in 2011, and their follow-up
 - o Methodology for elaborating the Strategic plan 2016-2020
 - o AEQES Reference framework
 - o Revision of the follow-up procedure: assessment of the implementation of the first round of follow-up evaluations
 - o AEQES Working Groups
 - o Procedure ma 06/1: terms and conditions for any collaboration between AEQES and another evaluation agency
 - o Code of ethics

OTHER REFERENCE SOURCES USED BY THE REVIEW PANEL

- AEQES - Plan stratégique 2016-2020 (fr)
- Référentiel AEQES (fr)
- Procédure de recrutement, de sélection et de composition des comités d'experts (fr)
- Le Manuel Qualité de l'AEQES (Eng and fr)
- Guide à destination des établissements (fr)
- Guide à destination des membres des comités d'experts (fr)
- Decree of 22 February 2008 (with subsequent changes) (fr)
- Visit schedules for two programmes evaluations (fr)
- Missions, activités, ressources financières et humaines de l'AEQES – Etat des lieux et perspectives (24 Aout 2016) (fr)
- Résultats des enquêtes réalisées auprès des établissements, des étudiants et des experts (fr)
- Rapport intermédiaire «Perspectives» (fr)
- Examples of evaluation reports and of transversal analyses (fr)



THIS REPORT presents findings of the ENQA Agency Review of the Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (AEQES) undertaken in 2016.



Agence pour l'Évaluation de
la Qualité de l'Enseignement Supérieur

2017 ENQA AGENCY REVIEW