

Policy on Targeted Reviews

(Register Committee policy according to §2.5 of the Procedures for Applications)

Register Committee
2 July 2021

Ref. RC/16.1
Ver. 1.0
Date 2021-06-24
Page 1 / 6

1. Introduction

An application for renewal of registration on the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) is supported by an external review against the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The results of an external review forms the basis for the Register Committee’s decision on ESG compliance and contributes to the trust building and transparency of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

Quality assurance agencies are expected to undergo an external review against the ESG at least once every five years (in line with ESG 3.7 and EQAR Procedures). EQAR monitors the registered agency’s compliance with the ESG during this period, primarily through annual updates, substantive change reports and complaints by third parties.

Many of the EQAR-registered agencies have already successfully gone through two consecutive reviews against the ESG and would be expected to repeat the same process they did five years prior.

For agencies where overall compliance with the ESG has already been proven, a more targeted review process could thus reduce the possible “evaluation fatigue” of repeated reviews and ensure that something meaningful is provided as part of a review process. The targeted review is made available for those agencies that have previously renewed their registration on EQAR successfully at least once. A targeted review would be followed by a full/complete review against the ESG again after five years (see example of a possible continuous review cycle in Figure 1).



Figure 1: Possible timeline of an external review cycle including a targeted review

2. Eligibility

The targeted review may only follow after at least two consecutive external reviews against the ESG that have led to a registration/renewal decision by

the Register Committee. Five years after the targeted review, a full external review will follow again, see also Figure 1 above.

Agencies are not eligible if any substantive changes were not duly reported, or not reported on time, during the last 5-year registration period¹. If such substantive changes are not reported but identified after the targeted review, the agency’s registration may be suspended, pending an extraordinary review of its registration.

The registered agency’s compliance with ESG Part 2 and Part 3 will, however, not be reassessed except for the standards covered in the review.

Register Committee
2 July 2021

Ref. RC/16.1
Ver. 1.0
Date 2021-06-24
Page 2 / 6

3. Scope

The statutory criterion for inclusion on the Register is substantial compliance with the ESG. The targeted review does not change the criteria for registration, but aims to place more focus on those parts that require attention.

Issues related to quality assurance agencies’ compliance with the ESG that were identified in change reports and the agencies’ last renewal of registration should be considered more closely. In addition, the targeted review provides the opportunity for agencies to receive feedback on a self-selected area for enhancement that is relevant for their own higher education system.

3.1 Focus Areas

The processes of **monitoring ESG compliance** of registered agencies i.e. annual updates, reporting of substantive changes and third-party complaints, form the basis of identifying the focus areas for the review.

The targeted review will address:	Applicable:
A) all the standards with a “partial compliance” conclusion in the Register Committee’s last renewal decision;	if the case
B) standards 2.1 to 2.7 for activities that were newly launched or changed since the agency’s last renewal of registration;	if the case
C) any standards affected by other types of substantive changes (organisational identity or structure, other fields of activity and their separation)	if the case
D) ESG 2.1 (see section below)	to all

¹See EQAR’s policy on reporting substantive changes
<https://www.eqar.eu/register/guide-for-agencies/reporting-and-renewal/>

E) at least one further enhancement area (see section below)	to all
F) any other matters re. ESG compliance arising during the review	if new issues arise

Register Committee
2 July 2021

Ref. RC/16.1
Ver. 1.0
Date 2021-06-24
Page 3 / 6

F) During the targeted review process panel members are asked to consider other matters outside the focus areas specified in the terms of reference and that may affect the compliance with the ESG if brought to their attention.

The panel’s investigation would feed into the review report and would be considered as part of the renewal decision by the Register Committee. In order to enable this, every review is expected to include interviews with the full range of stakeholders (as in a full review) and reserve adequate spare time for the panel to address any such issues that might arise.

3.2 Enhancement Component

Even in cases where QA agencies do not have any past compliance issues or substantive changes to address, the ESG are underpinned by the philosophy of continuous improvement. The targeted review therefore also includes a more enhancement-led approach in reviewing the agency’s external quality assurance processes. This approach allows agencies to demonstrate the benefit and added value of their external QA activities for their higher education sector.

The QA agency is expected to include in its self-evaluation report a reflection of its consideration of internal quality assurance (ESG 2.1) and at least one further area with ongoing or planned developments:

1. ESG standard 2.1 has a crucial importance as it specifies the quality dimensions that external quality assurance processes should be concerned with, i.e. validating that institutions have indeed implemented ESG 1.1 - 1.10. The agency should thus always reflect on this aspect, irrespective on whether any changes have been implemented since the last review (see guiding questions below).
2. In addition, the agency should choose at least one area of development from amongst those ESG Part 2 and 3 standards presented in the **Annex: Questions for Enhancement Areas in a Targeted Review**, where it can demonstrate specific ongoing or planned enhancement beyond the minimum requirements.

The area should be identified in the terms of reference and should be different from any standards already addressed per A – C above. The chosen standard(s) will be confirmed by EQAR as part of the eligibility application.

The review panel is expected to provide feedback, recommendations or commendations on the initiated developments as it sees fit.

4. Process

EQAR does not carry out reviews itself, but agrees to the tripartite terms of reference (ToR) for the review with the coordinator and applicant agency.

The steps for the external review process are the same as for full reviews. The review may be carried out by a smaller panel of three, instead of four, experts.

The tripartite terms of reference include the details of what the review (Self Evaluation Report and Review Report) is expected to cover (according to points A – E below).

In order to ensure a good shared understanding, the coordinator is required to organise a joint briefing with the panel and EQAR.

To ensure continuity and build on institutional knowledge in the external review process, the coordinator of the targeted review should normally be the same organisation that has coordinated the previous full/complete review against the ESG.

5. Judgement on ESG Compliance

The targeted external review against the ESG results in the **same type of decision** on agencies' renewal of registration on EQAR as a regular, full review.

The Register Committee makes a judgement on the agency's compliance with the ESG as a whole and an individual judgement on each standard on Part 2 and Part 3 (which may be substantial, partial compliance and no compliance).

Since not all standards are specifically addressed in the targeted review (see under §4.1), the Committee will reaffirm its previous judgments of compliance, unless evidence to the contrary comes to light.

With regard to the areas of enhancement chosen by the agency, the Register Committee will simply take note of these further developments in its decision on renewal of registration.

The principal interpretations of the standards and expectations of the Register Committee towards external review reports are explained in the Policy on the Use and Interpretation of the ESG for the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies².

Register Committee

2 July 2021

Ref. RC/16.1

Ver. 1.0

Date 2021-06-24

Page 4 / 6

²See more under: <https://www.eqar.eu/about/official-documents/#use-and-interpretation-of-the-esg>

6. Annex: Questions for Enhancement Areas in a Targeted Review

6.1 Standard to be Addressed in all Reviews

2.1 Consideration of internal quality assurance

External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance described in Part 1 of the ESG.

- Has the agency considered the effectiveness of the higher education institution's internal QA processes i.e. has the agency drawn on findings from its analysis of ESG Part 1?*
- Does the agency intend to enhance the effectiveness in addressing the internal QA of higher education institutions and the consideration of ESG Part 1?*

* If yes, this should be described in the self-evaluation and external review report.

* If no, the agency should specify if any changes have been planned or not.

6.2 At Least one of the Following Standards to be Chosen

2.2 Designing methodologies fit for purpose

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.

2.3 Implementing processes

n/a (this standard cannot be selected as an enhancement area)

2.4 Peer-review experts

External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).

2.5 Criteria for outcomes

Any outcomes or judgements 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.

2.6 Reporting

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.

Register Committee

2 July 2021

2.7 Complaints and appeals

Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.

Ref. RC/16.1

Ver. 1.0

Date 2021-06-24

Page 6 / 6

6.3 ESG Part 3: Standards and guidelines for quality assurance agencies

3.1 Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance

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.

3.2 Official status

n/a (this standard cannot be selected as an enhancement area)

3.3 Independence

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.

3.4 Thematic analysis

Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.

3.5 Resources

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

3.6 Internal quality assurance and professional conduct

Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.