

**Approval of the Application  
by AEQES (*Agence pour l'Évaluation de la  
Qualité de l'Enseignement Supérieur*)  
for Inclusion on the Register**

**Register Committee**  
1 December 2012

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**Ver.** 1.0

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1. The application of 9 March 2012 adhered to the requirements of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.
2. The Register Committee considered the report on the external review of June 2011 on the compliance of AEQES with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). The Register Committee found that the report provides reasonably clear evidence and analysis of how AEQES complies with the ESG, while it sets out a number of areas for improvement.
3. On 4/5 May 2012, the Register Committee considered AEQES' response to the various recommendations (of April 2012), but had found the information insufficiently decisive to enable the Committee to make an overall judgement on AEQES' substantial compliance with the ESG. It therefore deferred the consideration of AEQES' application for inclusion, pending additional information by AEQES on the (further) implementation of the improvement measures foreseen in certain areas and initial experiences with these measures.
4. The Register Committee considered AEQES' additional information of 5 October 2012. The Committee concluded that while a number of measures are still at the stage of development or planning, progress was visible in addressing the various areas for improvement.
5. With regard to the development of AEQES' processes (ESG 2.2) the Register Committee noted that the performance indicators currently in use were defined by the government of the French-speaking Community of Belgium, rather than developed by AEQES itself; and it was not entirely clear to what extent higher education institutions (HEIs) and stakeholders were involved in their development. The Register Committee considered that AEQES is currently testing a new Reference Framework, which was developed in consultation with stakeholders and is expected to become fully implemented in 2013. The development of AEQES' quality assurance processes will thus need to be analysed comprehensively in the next external review of AEQES, and this matter has been flagged.

6. With regard to consistency of decision making (ESG 2.3) the Committee considered the comments expressed by the review panel under ESG 2.2 that the lack of an agreed “operationalisation” of the performance indicators leads to a situation in which each expert panel operationalises them for a particular review. The Committee, however, concluded that the review report demonstrates that AEQES' reports show an adequate level of consistency in the light of their purposes, oriented towards enhancement rather than being a basis for formal decisions.
7. With regard to the evaluation reports published by AEQES (ESG 2.5) the Register Committee noted that the panel identified a need for improvement of their accessibility and readability for stakeholders, especially students. The Register Committee noted from AEQES response to the review panel's recommendations that this matter has started to be taken up with students.
8. The Register Committee noted that AEQES' follow-up procedures (ESG 2.6) have only been partially implemented in practice due to being in place only since 2008. The Committee further noted that the panel saw a need for more systematic follow-up procedures to fully comply with the standard. The Committee considered that the newly established guidelines for follow-up processes constitute a step towards fully embedding follow-up in AEQES' procedures. Whereas it has been noted that AEQES has requested the responsible ministry to make follow-up an obligatory part of the process, follow-up remains only optional at this stage. This issue has thus been flagged.
9. The Register Committee noted the panel's comments on the length of the evaluation cycles (ESG 2.7) but concluded that the cycle was clearly defined and noted that the ESG make no stipulations as to the length of the cycle.
10. The Register Committee noted that the panel had found AEQES resources (ESG 3.4) very limited and barely sufficient to carry out its core evaluation activities and preventing AEQES from undertaking further activities, such as an extension of training and workshops. The Committee took into account that AEQES has already employed some additional staff since the external review and also requested the competent ministry to grant greater autonomy in staff matters. Despite these improvements the matter remains in need of further attention and has therefore been flagged.

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11. The review panel concluded that AEQES operates fully independently (ESG 3.6) of government and HEIs, despite its close administrative ties to the ministry especially in relation to staff, and the Register Committee could accept that conclusion. At the same time, the panel noted that the perception by HEIs and stakeholders of AEQES' independence was sometimes different, presumably due to the close administrative connection to the ministry. The Register Committee noted that, at the invitation of the competent ministry, AEQES made proposals for a more independent organisational structure. The Committee considered that such a structural change might be one element to underline AEQES's independence as perceived by other stakeholders. While the government has started to work with AEQES on a concrete proposal for a new structure, no changes of the legal framework have materialised as yet. This has therefore been flagged.
12. The Register Committee noted that students did not participate in evaluation panels (ESG 3.7) at the time of the external review, whereas the review report demonstrated AEQES willingness to change its procedures to include students. The Register Committee took AEQES statement that it "has decided to include students in all future review panels" and that the "practice of including students will be extended to all review panels in 2013-2014" (additional information of 5/10/2012) as a firm, unconditioned commitment. As full implementation is, however, still to happen this issue has been flagged.
13. Based on the external review report and the additional information provided by AEQES, considering the matters addressed above and taking into account the steps AEQES has already and the commitments it has made, the Register Committee concurred with the review panel's judgement that AEQES complies substantially with the ESG and therefore approved the application.  
  
AEQES' inclusion shall be valid until 30/06/2016<sup>1</sup>.
14. The Register Committee underlined that the final implementation of the new Reference Framework as well as any other change to the legal framework of AEQES will constitute a substantive change on which AEQES is required to report to EQAR. This should be done in line with the guidelines on Reporting Substantive Changes<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Inclusion is valid for five years from the date of the external review report, see Art. 11 (1) of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.

<sup>2</sup> See: <http://www.eqar.eu/application/reporting-and-renewal.html>

15. The following issues have been flagged for particular attention when considering a potential application for renewal of inclusion:

ESG 2.2: Development of quality assurance processes

The entire process of developing and implementing the new Reference Framework should be addressed in a comprehensive manner, to analyse whether AEQES has been empowered to develop its own quality assurance criteria, in consultation with higher education institutions and stakeholders.

ESG 2.6: Follow-up procedures

Issues related to the systematic implementation and further development of AEQES follow-up procedures towards becoming a fully embedded feature of AEQES' procedures should be addressed.

ESG 3.4: Resources

It should be addressed whether AEQES has been equipped with sufficient resources to enable it to discharge its core activities fully and to extend its activities in terms of training, workshops and good practice sharing and dissemination. In that respect, also issues related to AEQES' autonomy in staff appointments should be addressed.

ESG 3.6: Independence and perceived independence

The implementation of changes to the organisational status and structure of AEQES, in order to underline its independence and to improve the perception by HEIs and stakeholders of its independence, should be addressed.

ESG 3.7: Participation of students on panels

It should be addressed whether AEQES has fully implemented its firm commitment to involve students on all evaluation panels.

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