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# OPEN CALL FOR PARTICIPATION OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES / GOVERNING BODIES OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

**The HAQAA Initiative announces a call for participation in pilot reviews of quality assurance agencies (QAA) to test a new African continental methodology, based upon the ASG-QA, as well as consultancy visits for other governing bodies of quality assurance.**

## INTRODUCTION

Quality assurance in higher education institutions is one core basis for revitalising higher education in Africa. The importance of quality assurance in higher education is recognised as a key area strategic area in the 2063 Agenda of the African Union, which prioritises a number of tools and measures for harmonizing the African higher education sector and rendering it both local responsive and globally competitive. Higher education quality assurance collaboration, and harmonisation more generally, is also a successful area of collaboration under the Joint Africa-EU Strategy. The aim is to establish compatible structures and systems which would facilitate academic mobility and foster comparability among qualifications.

As part of the Harmonisation of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation (HAQAA) Initiative, a three-year initiative of the European Union and African Union Commissions, funded in the context of the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership, **five pilot reviews of more established national quality assurance agencies (QAA) and five consultancy visits to countries with emerging national QAA or the interest to develop one will be conducted in 2018. This will contribute to the consolidation of quality culture in African higher education and, more specifically, to the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework (PAQAF)<sup>1</sup>.** The

<sup>1</sup> 'PAQAF'- The **Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework**, which the African Union Commission has had endorsed via its committees and its Council, is an overriding framework for a number of commitments related to quality assurance activities in Africa. The implementation of the Addis Convention for recognition and the African Quality Rating Mechanism – AQRM - are part of it, as are commitments to develop African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance, an African Credit Transfer System and a continental register for quality assurance agencies and national QA bodies. As many aspects of PAQAF have not yet been developed, the HAQAA Initiative is seen as a means to contribute to its implementation.

This initiative is implemented on behalf of the European and African Union Commissions by:



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visits and pilot reviews will utilise the newly developed **African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA)** and the review methodology developed in the HAQAA Initiative.

This important pilot exercise will promote the consolidation of distinctly African approaches towards quality assurance and accreditation, underpinned by transparent structures and organisations that have a common understanding on principles and procedures. It will support the implementation of the ASG-QA in QAAs and QA bodies themselves, so as to render them more transparent, self-reflective and visible to their own constituencies, across Africa and beyond.

The Association of African Universities (AAU), on behalf of the HAQAA Initiative consortium partners, is pleased to make an open call to national quality assurance agencies or other relevant governing bodies in higher education (such as a relevant Ministry) to participate in this pilot exercise. This exercise will specifically provide advice and recommendations for national bodies responsible for external quality assurance and encourage self-improvement. The exercise will not function as a ranking or scoring tool but as an enhancement led exercise for development. Beyond its formative purpose, it will also be used to revise and improve the African QAA review methodology for application in the future.

## **ABOUT THE HAQAA INITIATIVE**

The Harmonisation of African Higher Education, Quality Assurance and Accreditation (HAQAA) Initiative has been established to support the development of a harmonised quality assurance and accreditation system at institutional, national, regional and Pan-African continental level. It is funded by the European Union Commission, in the context of the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership, in which the African Union is a the principle partner.

More specifically, the HAQAA initiative aims to support PAQAF – the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework – endorsed by the African Union and driven by the African Union Commission. The activities carried out under HAQAA Initiative consider the different facets of PAQAF.

The Initiative is

- i. simultaneously reinforcing national quality assurance agencies/bodies and higher education institutional quality culture.
- ii. planting the seeds for aligning different existing regional quality assurance initiatives with PAQAF, and help to prop up new regional initiatives and quality assurance networks.

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- iii. giving all regions (Northern, Western, Central, Eastern and Southern Africa) and countries common tools with which to both relate and build their quality assurance systems, while respecting diverse needs.

The initiative is implemented for the African and European Union Commissions by a consortium consisting of:

- University of Barcelona (coordinator)
- Association of African Universities (AAU)
- German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)
- European University Association (EUA)
- European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

## 1. CONSULTANCY VISITS

In countries where a national QAA has not been established yet, is very young, and/or is still embedded in the ministry (whereby the country in question intends to establish an independent agency), consultancy visits are being proposed. A three-day visit will be organised with two experts, who will conduct interviews with the staff and locally based higher education institutions and relevant stakeholders, to better understand the state of play regarding external quality assurance, potential needs of the country and opportunities for development. An information and brainstorming session will be held with the quality assurance and ministry staff, as well as with local higher education institutions and students, to promote the good practices in quality assurance and inform about the African continental framework. Other meetings and interviews will be organized throughout the visit, in accordance with a tailored programme that will fit the needs of the country at hand. The HAQAA Team will work with both the quality assurance authorities and the experts to refine the objectives of the visit and desired outcomes and to design the fit-for-purpose programme for the experts.

The experts will produce a report after the visit which will outline recommendations for the further development and improvement of the quality assurance system of the country, with specific emphasis on the alignment of external quality assurance structures and approaches to continental norms and on the application of the ASG-QA.

### **Eligible bodies to apply for consultancy visits:**

Young, newly established quality assurance agencies of higher education or other bodies responsible for the development of external quality assurance (agencies), such as the Ministry of Education, from five different African regions.



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## 2. PILOT REVIEWS

Five pilot reviews of quality assurance agencies of higher education will be conducted to support established QAAs in 1) general further development and improvement, 2) adhering and adapting to the standards and guidelines established for the African continental framework (PAQAF and the ASG-QA) 3) increasing their visibility and 4) implementing transparent procedures that adhere to international norms. A four day site visit will be conducted by three international experts. The pilot reviews will also be a means to test the model for agency reviews developed in the HAQAA Initiative (which is intended to be further applied in the context of PAQAF in the future) as well as the applicability of the newly developed ASG-QA (on which the agency review model is based).

The pilot reviews are targeted at more established quality assurance agencies in Africa, namely those that have been in existence for longer, have possibly achieved sufficient autonomy/ independence in their processes, and that demonstrate interest in regional and African continental engagement.

The pilot review will provide the agencies an opportunity to be exposed to an external review for further development, The intention is also to contribute to the process of enhancing mutual recognition of accrediting decisions among quality assurance agencies in Africa, based on a shared understanding of how to perform external quality assurance and accreditation. The reviews will be at the same time a training opportunity for experts and agencies, who will gain first-hand experience in applying the ASG-QA via the new review model.

The report delivered by the expert team after the site visit will provide practical suggestions for improvement as well as general compliance with the ASG-QA, parts B and C (directed at QAAs). It is stressed that this is a voluntary exercise, and that there is no formal or legal consequence from the evaluation, other than to support the agency with its development and alignment at the continental level.

Participating agencies will be asked to provide feedback on the agency review model, for its enhancement and revision.

### **Eligible bodies to apply for pilot reviews:**

Already established national QAAs of higher education - from all five African regions.

## **TIMEFRAME FOR CONSULTANCY VISITS AND PILOT REVIEWS**

1. April 2018: Application period and assessment of applications.

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2. Second half of April 2018: Selection of participating agencies/bodies by the HAQAA consortium.
3. Second half of April 2018: Formulation of the terms of reference and other contractual documents between the participating organisations and the HAQAA consortium/ personalisation of approach for those organisations participating in consultancy visits.
4. April-July 2018: Further instructions to the participating organisations and the preparation of the self-assessment reports.
5. August 2018: Self-assessment reports are submitted to the panels.
6. October-November 2018: Site visits take place.
7. January 2019 Panels submit final reports to the HAQAA consortium.

## **HOW ORGANISATIONS CAN APPLY AND CRITERIA FOR SELECTION**

1. Interested organisations are asked to submit a motivation letter of one page, signed by the legal representative of the organisation, and answering the following questions:
  - Please describe briefly how external quality assurance functions in your country at present.
  - Please state if you are applying for a consultancy visit or a pilot review.
  - What is the motivation for your organisation to take part in this exercise?
  - How will you organise the preparation of the self-assessment report and site visit? Which institutions and stakeholders will you involve in this visit and why?
  - How would you describe the current situation at your organisation in relation to the regional and continental developments in quality assurance in Africa?
2. Deadline for submissions is **05 May 2018**.

When selecting the participating organisations, the HAQAA Consortium will look at the following aspects:

- The organisation's motivation to participate in this exercise;
- The diversity of selected organisations (e.g. level of development, geographical scope), and;
- Whether the organisation's expectations match what the exercise can realistically offer.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES OF SELECTED ORGANISATIONS**

Selected institutions will be responsible for:

1. Planning for sufficient resources to undergo the review.
2. Providing a contact person for the review.
3. Committing to the preparation of the Self-Assessment Report.

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4. Providing the Panel/expert group with any additional documentation they may request.
5. Planning and organising, in collaboration with the HAQAA consortium and the panel/expert group, the schedule and logistics of the site visit (including inviting the interviewees).
6. Providing support and local transport for the expert team conducting the assessment visit, and organising their stay accordingly.

\*\*Visits will be conducted in English (for English and Arabic speaking organisations), in French for French speaking organisations and in Portuguese for Lusophone organisations.

**Applications and any enquiries should be sent to: [nfontg@ub.edu](mailto:nfontg@ub.edu)**

**Deadline for applications: 05 May 2018**

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