

**Focused Review of
European Council for Theological Education**

COORDINATED by ASIIN

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I. Introduction

The European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) Committee met on 14 March 2022 to consider the application of the European Council for Theological Education (ECTE) for listing in the EQAR based on its compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines. In order to reach a final decision, the Register Committee (RC) recapitulated the history of this application and built on decisions taken before.

The RC had previously found that the application, dating 11 September 2020, adhered to the requirements of the EQAR procedures for applications. It equally had confirmed eligibility of the application (Tripartite Terms of Reference) on 21 November 2020 having considered further clarification from the review coordinator on 11 September 2020. As central part of the process, it had reviewed the external review report elaborated by an international review team of the coordinating institution ASIIN, taking into consideration further information and documentation concerning changes introduced by the ECTE after the completion of this review (e.g. revised ECTE Operation as well as Organisation & Revised Standards and Guidelines). Finally, it also had received additional input on the part of the Chair of the ASIIN review team.

In a prior meeting in 2021, the Register Committee had postponed its decision on the application in view of ongoing policy consultations of the EQAR governmental members on questions related to the concept and group of “Alternative Providers” (APs) which constitute the core clientele of the ECTE. These consultations meanwhile have come to a (preliminary) end with the result that “Alternative Providers” and their educational offerings are in principle (?) eligible for inclusion in the EQAR. Thus, a central barrier for the ECTE’s listing in the EQAR had been removed (more on the definitions of AP’s as opposed to Higher Education Institutions can be found in subsequent parts of this report).

Another loose end is related to the level of programmes to be considered for inclusion in the Database of External Quality Assurance (DEQAR). In its first review, the focus of the review team had been on the compliance level of the ECTE’s accreditation activities regarding levels 6 and 7 of the European Qualification Framework, whereas the external QA activities of the ECTE related to “certificates and diplomas” on level 5 of the EQF had been not studied in detail. The activities related to this EQA level had not been checked more thoroughly, as the expert team had operated under the premise that both the ESG and the DEQAR database of the EQAR cover only formal tertiary education at the Bachelor and Master level. It therefore did not integrate in its review external QA procedures of the ECTE related to programmes belonging to the category of post-secondary courses and programmes such as EQF Level 5 partial and Level 5 or the Postgraduate Certificates in Theology.

The Register Committee however has determined that the ESG generally cover higher education in its broadest sense and can equally be applied to educational offerings/provisions not being part of a programme leading to a formal degree. On its finding, that EQF level 5 and the provision of education offering outside full formal degree programmes are not per se excluded from the scope of the ESG, the RC requested this analysis to be included in this focused review.

Based on this information, the Register Committee in its meeting identified three European Standards and Guidelines (ESG 2.1, ESG 3.1 as well as ESG 3.3), which either were found to

be non- or partially compliant and/or which necessitated further clarification in the framework of a subsequent focused review. The corresponding topics have fed into the new Terms of Reference, which can be found in the Annex of this report, and which are dealt with in the following in more detail.

2. Composition of the Review Team and Conduct of the Focused Review

This focused review was executed by ASIIN as contracted coordinator of this listing procedure. The primary purpose of this focused review is to clarify open questions in a follow up of the 2021 external review of ECTE, which the Register Committee had identified as a prerequisite to verify that the reviewed organization acts in compliance with the European Standard and Guidelines. While executing this task, the expert panel has taken into account EQAR's use and interpretation of the ESG. This focused review was conducted in line with the process described in the EQAR Procedure for Applications and in Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews, and according to the timeline set out in the Terms of Reference. The expert panel for the external review of ECTE has been appointed by ASIIN and was composed of the following members:

- Dr Anne Herman Flierman (Chair), former President of the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO).
- Prof Dr Patrick Becker (Panel Member), Professor for Catholic Theology (Professur für Fundamentaltheologie und Religionswissenschaft), University of Erfurt, Germany.
- Stanimir Boyadzhiev (Panel Member- Student Representative), University of Ruse "Angel Kanchev", Bulgaria.
- Dr Iring Wasser (Panel Member, Secretary), Managing Director of ASIIN, Germany.

The visit was conducted in a hybrid fashion. The experts jointly identified and agreed on the core stakeholder representatives, which they interviewed in a face-to-face meeting taking place in ASIIN's headquarters in Düsseldorf on November 23, 2022. Other stakeholder representatives, coming from all across Europe and beyond, were present via Zoom. Prior to conducting the interviews, the expert team had been briefed by the Secretary General of the EQAR, Colin Tück, as foreseen in the procedural guideline of the EQAR.

The list of all interview partners as well as the schedule of this focused review can be found in the Annex to this report.

III. Scope of the Focused Review

The following three ESG criteria have been identified by the RC to be the core of this focused review. For each of these criteria the background (point of departure) is described, followed by the expert's analysis and findings and complemented at the end in the compliance levels according to the experts' opinions.

ESG 2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE – THE CONSISTENT USE OF CRITERIA/DIFFERENT PROFILES

POINT OF DEPARTURE

The RC had inferred from the first ASIIN expert report, that in 2020 the ECTE had switched from a combined institutional and programme accreditation procedure to a new system in which an accreditation review could be contracted individually for both types of reviews. The expert panel had found that whereas the combined procedure had effectively and fully translated ESG part I, this was not found to be the case once this combined procedure was split up in two components. In the aftermath of the review and its findings, the ECTE revised its corresponding procedures and criteria to address this shortcoming. The RC stressed the importance of a thorough analysis of the basic concept/design of ECTE's institutional and programme accreditation in light of these recent changes, in particular how the two types of accreditations relate to or complement each other.

The RC equally had noted that the new revised standards would be employed only for reviews starting as of January 2022 and were not operational at the time when the expert team executed the first review. It therefore requested that the implementation of these new standards would be thoroughly checked in the framework of the focused review due to this particular reason.

The Register Committee in its decision had also stressed that coherent attention to the full implementation of the ESG I was of particular importance on the background that the ECTE almost exclusively accredits Alternative Providers (see further below). It therefore requested an analysis and corresponding evidence whether the ESG 2.1 is applied to Alternative Providers and that the qualifications resulting from programmes refer to the correct level of the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF- EHEA).

The RC furthermore requested that particular evidence was to be collected and analysed in relation to the programmes/qualifications that were not considered in the initial review report, namely

- intermediate qualifications within the EQF Level 5/Short Cycle (formerly Certificate) as well as
- qualifications within the EQF Level 5/Short Cycle (formerly Diploma) and finally
- intermediate qualifications within the EQF Level 7/Second Cycle (formerly Postgraduate Certificate).

In addition, the RC had - considering the practice-oriented profile in the ECTE's standards for Bachelor and Master programmes - put in question, whether these standards are applied to academic, professionally-oriented programmes in the scientific field of theology, or whether these programmes might be purely vocational training programmes for future jobs in evangelical communities. The RC had announced not to consider programmes of a purely vocational nature as aligned to the QF-EHEA and requested, that the focused review would discuss specifically these different profiles.

Thus, the RC judged ECTE as non-compliant regarding ESG 2.1

FINDINGS OF THE FOCUSED REVIEW

In preparation of the focused review, the experts had studied the new Criteria and Procedures of the ECTE, which are used for an integrated approach of institutional and programme accreditation for initial and cyclical reviews as of January 2022 and which in their opinion cover all ESG I criteria. They take note of the fact that this document applies uniformly to all ECTE programme levels (here 5-7), all types of providers (Higher Education Institutions as well as Alternative Providers) and all programme orientations (research and practice-oriented programmes).

The experts had furthermore requested and were provided with a list of accreditation procedures, which had been conducted after 1 January 2022, the qualifying date for the use of the new Criteria and Procedures developed by the ECTE. Altogether, 5 reviews have taken place in the interim: one initial review as well as three cyclical reviews and one institutional review whose programme review is planned for May of next year). The experts in their analysis of the corresponding accreditation reports confirm that the ECTE is conducting integrated reviews covering the entire ESG I. Among the list of procedures figured programmes at EQF level 5 (Short cycle-Partial), EQF 5 (Short Cycle) , EQF 6 (First Cycle) and EQF 7 (Second Cycle) programmes delivered by Alternative Providers as well as practice oriented programmes. Based on this sample, the experts can also attest that the ECTE Standards and Guidelines are equally applied to all programmes under review, irrespective of the learning level and the type of provider. This finding is confirmed in extensive interviews by the expert panel conducted with members of the ECTE's Visiting Evaluation Teams as well as representatives from the reviewed institutions.

As regards the question of whether the criteria of the ECTE are robust, fully aligned with/to the QF-EHEA and applied stringently in all its higher education procedures, the ECTE reports, that its policies and procedures have integrated the Dublin Descriptor of the European Higher Education Area right from the beginning of its operations. In the revised ECTE Standard and Guidelines, published in 2019, the experts identify a direct quote from ESG I.2. relating to the qualification framework: "The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for Higher Education and consequently to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area."

Additional explanatory guidance regarding the use of the Dublin Descriptors/QF-EHEA is found in an additional document of the ECTE entitled "Guidelines for Programme Design and use of ECTS". These documents are valid irrespective of the fact, that the nomenclature of qualifications have been shifted from the former Certificate-Diploma-Bachelor-Master to the numbered EQF level 5-7/QF-EHEA cycles (Short, First and Second). The ECTE moreover provides a detailed overview for 23 programmes accredited in the period 2019-2022 (including links to the respective reports), analysing their respective level of implementation of the QF-EHEA in compliance to ESG I. Based on these pieces of evidence, the ASIIN expert team finds that the ECTE programme accreditation adheres to the QF-EHEA descriptors as required for higher education qualifications.

The ECTE has furthermore submitted an action plan for the near future with the following elements: in its own training of its Visiting Expert Teams (VET) in the spring of 2022 and

scheduled for March 2023, the focus is announced to be the QF-EHEA learning outcomes in programme accreditation. In addition, the newly appointed Accreditation Director of the ECTE reportedly has informed all accredited institutions of this focus as part of the response to the Annual Progress reports. She will also provide applicants for accreditation procedures with substantial briefings on the topic.

COMPLIANCE LEVEL

The experts find the ECTE to be fully compliant with this ESG and are of the opinion, that all concerns of the EQAR Committee have been properly addressed.

ESG 3.1 (ACTIVITIES, POLICIES AND PROCESSES FOR QA) -TRANSPARENCY OF STATUS OF PROVIDERS AND CONSISTENT USE OF QUALIFICATION NOMENCLATURE IN ACCORDANCE WITH LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

POINT OF DEPARTURE

The RC has determined that the education offerings of “Alternative Providers” are in principle eligible for inclusion in its Database of External Quality Assurance (DEQAR). The RC also joined the ASIIN expert team in its finding that the review by the ECTE as a European QA network is frequently the only option available for alternative providers to obtain inclusion in the international register.

In its prior meetings, the RC had however voiced serious concerns regarding the transparency of different types of institutions accredited by the ECTE and had questioned whether the ECTE is providing clear public representation and distinction of the formal status of accredited institutions in their respective contexts and countries. The RC requested that the ECTE in its documents and public communication, on its website and in its register of accredited institutions and programmes clearly distinguish between HEIs, that award nationally recognized degrees and alternative providers that offer higher education qualifications, which are not formally recognized in the countries where the respective provider operates.

Concerning the nomenclature, evidence of an appropriate and consistent use of qualification nomenclature (indicating EQF levels only) by alternative providers, in accordance with legal requirements for and conventional use of this nomenclature was to be secured. In addition, the RC equally obligated (?) the ECTE to take adequate measures to ensure that the providers it accredits display the same level of clarity about their formal status on their part.

The RC requested that the ECTE find solutions to all of these concerns and asked that the measures taken would be considered in the course of the focused review. Thus, the RC judged ECTE as partially compliant regarding ESG 3.1.

FINDINGS OF THE FOCUSED REVIEW

On the background of the above introduction, the ASIIN expert team in this focused review was commissioned to check whether the ECTE has properly defined and made transparent

- that the vast majority of its constituents and clients belong to the category of Alternative Providers, which the EQAR Register Committee in principle sees eligible for inclusion in the DEQAR as long as the fact that they are Alternative Providers is clearly documented and presented as such in communication of ECTE and its constituents, the Alternative Providers themselves.
- that the wording educational qualifications (, first and second cycle programmes) etc. is used in line with the higher education laws of the country in which the Alternative Provider is offering its services. In particular it is important that the terms ‘Bachelor’ and ‘Master’ are reserved only for such degrees, presented by acknowledged institutions.

In their Self-Assessment Report and during the interviews, the leadership and staff of ECTE informed the ASIIN expert team about a considerable number of remedial actions taken since the last review and the corresponding decision of the EQAR. It reports and puts to the minutes that it

- has remodelled and “cleaned up” the website of ECTE, placing prominently the characteristics and legal standing of Alternative Providers and also checking carefully the denominations of its educational offerings.¹ In practically all instances, where national educational law does not permit the use of the Bachelor-/Master-terminology, reference is now being made to the corresponding EQF levels without using the terminology of these “protected degree nomenclature”.
- also has contacted all of its stakeholder and clients, making sure that transparent and consistent terminology is not only used among its own ranks/in its own documents and websites, but also on the side of its member organizations/among the ranks of accredited programmes and higher education institutions.
- has furthermore in the interim organized a series of workshops, in which the topics at hand have been extensively discussed with its Visiting Evaluation Teams and accredited institutions. In some instances, these discussions have reportedly not been easy, as

¹ As one example, the following statement can be found on the website of the ECTE: “An important distinction is made in European higher education between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Alternative Providers (Aps). Both kinds of institutions offer educational opportunities with learning outcomes at higher education level... However, a HEI can award formal degrees with protected degree nomenclature recognised by local authorities, an AP does not award formal degrees. The ECTE recognises this important distinction and aims to determine only the quality and level of learning opportunities as defined by the QF-EHAE and not the status of the institutions nor their ability to award formal degrees....”. ([http://ecte.eu/ecte-accreditation\(ecte-accreditation-and-institutional-status/\)](http://ecte.eu/ecte-accreditation(ecte-accreditation-and-institutional-status/)))

theological institutions in Europe and beyond in some instances were confiding in the use of well-established degrees and terminology.

After taking note of this information and listening to the various stakeholder groups during the interviews, the experts are impressed with the radical departure of the ECTE and the huge amount of work invested into securing transparency in a comparatively short period of time.

After checking the documents and the website of the ECTE, the expert team confirm that the ECTE clearly, proactively, and transparently has remodelled and corrected all inconsistencies. The ECTE must equally be commended on thoroughly refurbishing its register of accredited programmes and institutions, accurately pointed to the status of the provider and the degrees issued.

Ever more impressive than “doing its own homework” is the fact that the ECTE leadership and staff have proactively touched base with its own members in the HE community/among its clients pointing to the need of also having corresponding, consistent, transparent, and clear public information available on their own internal and external documents and website appearances. To this end, the ECTE has engaged in direct contact between its headquarters staff and its counterparts (leadership, QA departments) of the reviewed educational providers. It also has carried through a number of training workshops and webinars.

Most importantly, the ECTE successfully uses the instrument of its Annual Progress Report (which the ASIIN expert team commended in its report of 2021) requesting the accredited institutions and programmes to report on this issue. Finally, it also has spelled out clear sanctions for all HEIs, which are not following suite and continue to use terminology not in line with the above. In case of non-compliance, the ECTE reserves the right to cancel or suspend an accreditation and put a member ‘under supervision’.

The experts highly commend the ECTE for the remarkable progress in this area. They are very much reassured by the fact, that in all separate discussion rounds with stakeholder groups, they witnessed a high awareness for the topics at stake. To be sure, for some of the higher education provider, using the terminology of Alternative Providers and giving up the use of well-established Bachelor and Master degree nomenclature has not been easy. The experts nevertheless learned in the extended discussions that even for those, who did wrestle with the changes in policies, these eventually were accepted and even considered a decisive step forward in defining transparently their own role /their own services for their constituents.

The experts thoroughly examined the empirical evidence to support this claim and find that all documents and the website have been changed as described.

COMPLIANCE LEVEL

The experts find ECTE fully compliant with this ESG and are of the opinion that all concerns of the EQAR Committee have been properly addressed.

ESG 3.3 INDEPENDENCE (SEPARATION OF POWERS, CREATION OF AN INDEPENDENT ACCREDITATION COMMISSION)

POINT OF DEPARTURE

Evidence and analysis of the restructuring and the redefined functions of the Accreditation Commission, the (non) involvement of the ECTE Council and Visitation Evaluation Teams (VETs) in accreditation decisions and the independence of VETs.

This responsibility was before vested in the ECTE Council as the highest governing body of the ECTE.

Thus, the RC judged ECTE as partially compliant regarding ESG 3.3

FINDINGS OF THE FOCUSED REVIEW

The experts learned that as a consequence of their observations in the initial review, the ECTE has meanwhile proceeded with the creation of a separate Accreditation Commission (AC) which now has the exclusive responsibility for reaching the final accreditation decision, based on the experts' report. The AC has thus taken over and is assuming responsibilities, which before the reform were vested in the ECTE Council as the highest governing body of the ECTE. The experts learn during the interviews with members of both bodies (Council and Commission), that this separation is widely appreciated.

During the interviews, the ASIIN expert panel learns that the AC currently is composed of seven members, among them four staff members including the General Secretary of ECTE, the newly appointed ECTE Accreditation Director plus two Review Secretaries (one of the two was recently added to the staff on the recommendation of the team during the first review). A minority, currently only three members of the AC, are voting members and are exclusively responsible for taking the final accreditation decisions. This is a relatively small group, considering the scope of ECTE's constituency. Moreover, at the moment of the visit, there was neither a student nor a representative from the employer side on the AC.

Another important feature of the current set-up is the fact that the newly appointed Accreditation Director as one of the most experienced staff and non-voting members also chairs the Accreditation Commission. During the discussions, the representatives of ECTE put to the minutes, that the Accreditation Commission as a new body is in the course of development and that further appointments were already planned to broaden Stakeholder representation and the range of expertise in this central body.

ECTE furthermore has included a (preliminary) statutes of the Accreditation Commission (Accreditation Commission Policy and Procedures), in which the composition, the functions, the rights and responsibilities etc. are laid down.

The experts commend ECTE for "disentangling" the responsibilities of the ECTE Council, which in the past was responsible for practically all activities and decisions of the ECTE. With the institutionalization of the new Accreditation Commission, the responsibilities are now clearly separated and the new setup in line with comparable models of other EQAR listed agencies.

At the same time, the expert panel identifies a number of issues, which still have to be considered and acted on to achieve full compliance with the European Standard and Guidelines:

- To be fully ESG compatible, the Accreditation Commission of ECTE must include all major stakeholder groups including permanent voting representatives of the student body and the employer side.
- The number of voting members needs to be increased in order to put the final decision on a broader basis and avoid situation, in which decisions are based on a 2:1 vote. Due to the fact that decisions according to the current regulations can also be taken, if one of the three voting members is absent, even the possibility of split decisions is imminent.
- Increasing the number of members is not related only to the exigency of having representatives of the major stakeholder groups (academics, students, employer representatives) and having solid voting majorities, but is also warranted to increase the expertise in the Accreditation Commission, which after all is faced with a broad range of different accreditation decisions. The experts observe that the AC will have to make final decisions related to programme as well as institutional accreditation and will have to cover decisions for the EQF levels 5-7, including short cycle courses in continuous education, etc. As a cross-national, subject specific European QA, the ECTE accredits theology programmes and institutions in many countries in Europe and beyond and therefore needs corresponding expertise in its Accreditation Commission.
- Another concern stems from the fact that, according to the current statutes, staff members are **formal members** of the AC and currently are in the majority (albeit without vote). This has an impact in terms of group/boardroom dynamics. The experts advise ECTE to reconsider the status of its staff members as formal members of the Accreditation Commission and recommend foreseeing their presence in the Commission only in a guest function when required. Given the small number of voting members at the moment, they also recommend that at this stage the decisions of the AC are taken without the presence of the staff members, eventually with the exception of the accreditation manager who is responsible for communicating and executing decisions of the commission.
- By the same token, the experts see a need that the Chair of the Accreditation Commission is selected among the voting members of the body and not from the staff members.

As regards the current version of the AC Policies and Procedures, the experts learn that this document is under revision with a number of points still in need to be properly defined and regulated. This includes definitions related to modes of appointment and voting, length of terms for AC members and number of terms for service.

In the discussions with the various stakeholder groups, it becomes clear that the ECTE is aware of most of the issues and concerns enumerated above. This becomes especially clear during the discussion with the representatives of the Accreditation Commission itself. The ECTE convincingly argues that the establishment of the AC was followed by a transitional

phase and full development is still a work in progress. AC members point to upcoming ECTE Council meetings at the beginning of December, in the framework of which the AC will be enlarged and restructured.

The expert team has little doubt that the ECTE will implement the necessary adaptations on short notice, but equally point to one of the iron rules of external QA, that an expert team has to evaluate what they find at the moment of the on-site visit. ECTE declares its willingness and preparedness to follow up on the observations of the expert team and to formally implement the necessary changes in the course of December 2022 before submitting the report to the EQAR register committee at the beginning of 2023. In this process, ECTE furthermore vows to also finalize and modify the AC Policies and Procedures in order to have a written document with sound institutional and procedural set-up of this central body. It will be the final authority of ECTE's Council to pass this central document.

COMPLIANCE LEVEL

The experts find that the design and the composition of ECTE's Accreditation Commission are at this stage not yet properly addressed and judge the compliance level currently as non-compliant. They are however optimistic, that the announced short-term adaptations will address the list of issues mentioned above.

ANNEXES

ANNEX I: TERMS OF REFERENCE

Focused External review of (the European Council for Theological Education - ECTE) against the ESG 2.1, 3.1 and 3.3

TERMS OF REFERENCE

These Terms of Reference were agreed between ECTE, ASIIN and EQAR

1. Background

The European Council for Theological Education (ECTE) is a cross-border, subject-specific quality assurance agency offering institutional and program accreditation for higher education institutions and alternative providers delivering programs / higher education learning opportunities in the discipline of theology.

The ECTE applied initially for registration EQAR in 2021. This focused review follows the rejection of the initial application by ECTE for registration on the grounds specified in the EQAR Register Committee's decision of 28 June 2022 (Ref. RC34/A100, annex I, <https://data.deqar.eu/agency/70>).

In June 2022, ECTE officially approached ASIIN to coordinate the above-mentioned focused review and prepare a review report that will be considered for the purpose of EQAR- registration. On the 22nd of August 2022, ASIIN agreed to coordinate the focused review.

2. Purpose and scope of the evaluation

2.1 Scope: This focused review will include all ECTE activities, including those not addressed in the initial review. Namely:

- Institutional accreditation
- Program accreditation with regard to the following EQF/QF-EHEA levels:
 - o EQF Level 5/Short cycle / programs, including an intermediate qualification
 - o EQF Level 6/First Cycle / programs
 - o EQF Level 7/Second Cycle / programs, including an intermediate qualification.

2.2 Purpose: This focused review will evaluate the extent to which ECTE's activities in the mentioned areas are compliant with standards 2.1, 3.1 and 3.3 of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), with a particular focus on the below named aspects:

2.2.1 - ESG 2.1 (Consideration of internal Quality Assurance (QA)):

- o Analysis of the basic concept/design of ECTE's institutional and programme accreditation in light of the recent changes, in particular how the two types of accreditation relate to or complement each other
- o Evidence and analysis of the implementation of the entirety of ESG part I in both institutional and all program accreditation/certification activities, in both theory and practice visible in ECTE reports.
- o Evidence and analysis whether ESG 1.2 is applied to alternative providers and that the qualifications resulting from programmes refer to the correct level of the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF- EHEA).

- Evidence and analysis whether criteria are robust, fully aligned with the QF- EHEA and applied stringently in all cases, to protect the label and designation of what will be perceived as “higher education”.
- Particular evidence to be collected and analysed in relation to the programs/qualifications that were not considered in the initial review report:
 - an intermediate qualification within the EQF Level 5/Short Cycle (formerly Certificate)
 - a qualification within the EQF Level 5/Short Cycle (formerly Diploma).
 - an intermediate qualification within the EQF Level/Second Cycle (formerly Postgraduate Certificate).

2.2.2 - ESG 3.1 (Activities, policies and processes for QA):

- Concerning the status of education providers, evidence and analysis whether ECTE is providing clear public representation and distinction of the formal status of accredited institutions in their respective contexts and countries, in particular a transparent distinction between higher education institutions (that award nationally recognized qualifications) and alternative providers.
- Evidence and analysis whether ECTE takes sufficient measures to ensure that the providers it accredits ensure the same level of clarity about their formal status.
- Concerning the nomenclature, evidence and analysis of ECTE’s assurance of an appropriate and consistent use of qualification nomenclature (such as ‘Bachelor’ and ‘Master’) by alternative providers, in accordance with legal requirements for and conventional use of this nomenclature.

2.2.3 - ESG 3.3 (Independence):

- Evidence and analysis of the restructuring and the redefined functions of the Accreditation Commission, the (non) involvement of the ECTE Council and Visitation Evaluation Teams (VETs) in accreditation decisions and the independence of VETs.

The review will provide the basis for EQAR to review ECTE’s initial application.

3. The review process

The review will be conducted in line with the requirements of the EQAR Procedures for Applications.

The evaluation procedure consists of the following steps:

- Formulation of the draft Terms of Reference for the focused review between ECTE and ASIIN;
- Agreement on the Terms of Reference by EQAR;
- Nomination and appointment of the focused review panel by ASIIN;
- Self-assessment by ECTE including the preparation and publication of a focused self-assessment report;
- A focused site visit by the review panel to ECTE, whereas at least the review panel meets in person and talks to the ECTE key actors in person;
- Preparation and completion of the final focused review report by the review panel;
- Analysis of the final focused review report and decision-making by the EQAR Register Committee.

3.1 Independence of the review coordinator

ASIIN has not provided remunerated (e.g. consultancy) or unremunerated services to ECTE during the past 5 years, except for the initial review of ECTE; conversely ECTE has not provided any remunerated or unremunerated services to ASIIN.

Both ASIIN and ECTE committed themselves not to be reviewed in the next 5 years by the agency for which it coordinates the review.

3.2 Nomination and appointment of the review team members

The review panel consists of three, members of which one was not involved in the previous ECTE review.

- one representative of an accreditation agency not related to ECTE, preferably whose activities include QA of alternative providers
- one Academic Staff Member of a HEI
- one student representative.

ASIIN as coordinator of the review process ensures the selection of the Review Panel. The coordinator takes responsibility for selecting qualified experts in a fair and transparent procedure. ASIIN, as a membership organization recruits among its member's committee members and honorary expert panel members for the organisation's activities. Therefore, ASIIN can dispose of a pool of more than 1.000 experienced reviewers in the general field of institutional review and accreditation as well as in the subject-specific fields of ASIIN's program accreditation activities. ASIIN organizes on a regular basis trainings for the experts. Thus, ASIIN ensures that all its experts are experienced in working with the ESG and criteria sets based on the ESG, performing site-visits and leading stakeholder discussions.

Panel members are selected with the support of the relevant Technical Committees and appointed by the Accreditation Commission. While recruiting student representatives, ASIIN cooperates with the German student pool for accreditation as well as with the European student union. In case ASIIN reviews programmes or institutions related to subject-specific fields that are not within the traditional ASIIN expertise, ASIIN cooperates closely with a variety of other, subject-specific organizations and networks, especially through the European Alliance for Subject-Specific and Professional Accreditation and Quality Assurance (EASPA).

Accordingly, ASIIN will ensure that all panel members have either completed a formal training for agency reviews against the ESG 2015, or have participated in at least two reviews of quality assurance agency against the ESG that were accepted to support an application to EQAR.

ASIIN will provide ECTE with a list of suggested experts and their respective curricula 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 ECTE focused review, covering at least the cases of interest defined in the EQAR Code of Conduct.

Once appointed, ASIIN will inform EQAR about the panel members.

Among the panel members, a Chair is chosen. The selected panel members represent a variety of European contexts and are completely independent from the agency under review.

The panel will be supported by the Managing Director of ASIIN who will act as Secretary to the Panel, monitor the integrity of the process and ensure that EQAR's requirements are met. The project manager will take care of the organization of the procedure and the site visit, take notes of

the discussions with ECTE and draft a proposed review report for the discussion among the review panel members.

3.2 Focused self-assessment by ECTE, including the preparation of a focused self- assessment report

ECTE is responsible for the execution and organization of its own focused self-assessment process and shall take into account the ESG areas specifically addressed in chapter 2.2 above. The focused self-assessment shall be well-structured, concise and comprehensively prepared. It shall clearly demonstrate the extent to which ECTE is compliant to the specified elements of ESG 2.1, 3.1 and 3.3 and thus meets the requirements for EQAR registration.

ASIIN offers to ECTE the option of having the SAR formally scrutinized before submitting the final version of the report. This scrutiny does not involve an assessment of the content itself but merely check the formal adequacy and completeness of the report and its annexes.

The report will be submitted to the review panel at the latest 6 weeks prior to the site visit.

3.3 A focused site visit by the review panel

The review panel will draft a proposal of the site visit schedule which shall be submitted to the ECTE at least one month before the planned dates of the visit. The schedule is to include an indicative timetable of the meetings and other exercises to be undertaken by the review panel during the focused site visit, the duration of which will be 1- 2 days. The approved schedule shall be given to ECTE at least two weeks before the site visit.

The site visit will close with a final de-briefing meeting outlining the panel's overall impressions but not its judgement on compliance of the agency to the specified elements of ESG 2.1, 3.1 and 3.3.

3.4 Preparation and completion of the final focused review report

The focused review report will be drafted in consultation with all review panel members and correspond to the purpose and scope of the review as defined under article §2 above. In particular, it will provide a clear rationale for its findings concerning the specified elements of ESG 2.1, 3.1 and 3.3.

When preparing the report, the review panel should bear in mind the A100_ECTE_RejectionDecision to ensure that the report will contain sufficient information for the Register Committee to decide on the acceptance of ECTE to EQAR.

A draft report will first be submitted to ECTE within six weeks of the site visit for comment on factual accuracy. If ECTE chooses to provide a statement in reference to the draft report, it will be submitted to ASIIN within 1 week after the receipt of the draft report.

Thereafter, the review panel taking into account the statement by ECTE a will finalize the report in coordination with ASIIN. ASIIN will sign and provide to ECTE the Declaration of Honour together with the final report.

The report is to be finalized within eight weeks after the site visit.

4. Decision-making on EQAR registration

ECTE will submit the review report via email to EQAR. ECTE will also include its self- assessment report (in a PDF format), the Declaration of Honor and the full curriculum vitae (CVs) of all review panel members. In addition, ECTE may provide any other relevant documents to the application (i.e. annexes, statement to the review report).

EQAR is expected to consider the review report and the agency's application at its Register Committee meeting in (February 2023).

5. Publication of the report

ECTE will publish the final review report on its website. The report will also be published on the EQAR website together with the decision on registration, regardless of the outcome.

6. Indicative schedule of the review

Agreement on Terms of Reference	August/2022
Appointment of review panel members	September/2022
Self-assessment submitted, feedback received from ASIIN and completed	September/2022
Preparation of site visit schedule and indicative timetable	September/2022
Briefing of review panel members (involving the EQAR Director)	October/2022
Review panel site visit	Mid-November/2022
Draft review report	December/2022
Statement of ECTE to review panel (if applicable)	December/2022
Submission of final report to ECTE and EQAR	mid-January 2023
EQAR Register Committee meeting and decision on the application by ECTE	February 2023

ANNEX 2: SCHEDULE: ASIIN FOCUSED REVIEW OF ECTE FOR EQAR





As of 11 November 2022





All Interview Sessions are usually followed by discussion time of the panel. All persons per meeting are listed in alphabetical order.

All times are in CET (Berlin/Amsterdam)




As of today (11 November 2022) all ECTE participants are confirmed. Zoom Link will be provided by ASIIN




The ASIIN-Panel










		CURRENT CONTEXT
Prof. Dr. Patrick Becker, Germany		Panel Member Professor für Fundamentaltheologie und Religionswissenschaft (Professor of Fundamental Theology and Religious Studies), University of Erfurt, Germany
Stanimir Boyadzhiev Bulgaria		Student Representative Current Studies: Leadership & Management Harvard Business School Online PhD @ Theory of the state and law. History of political and legal doctrines University of Ruse "Angel Kanchev"
Dr. A. Herman Fliermann, Netherlands		Panel Leader
Dr. Iring Wasser, ASIIN Germany		Managing Director of ASIIN


INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS	ROLE	ROLES OUTSIDE ECTE
8.30 – 9.30: Accreditation Staff		
Grace Al-Zoughbi 	Review Secretary	
Dr. Graham Cheeseman 	Review Secretary	
Carmen Crouse 	Accreditation Director	
Dr. Marvin Oxenham 	General Secretary	Director ICETE Academy
9.30 – 9.45 Internal Panel Meeting		

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS	ROLE	ROLES OUTSIDE ECTE
9.45 – 10.45: Accreditation Commission		
Mrs. Grace Al- Zoughbi 	Review Secretary (voice/no vote)	
Dr. Graham Cheeseman 	Review Secretary (voice/no vote)	
Mrs. Carmen Crouse 	Accreditation Director (voice/no vote)	
Dr. Hubert Juergensen 	Voting AC Member	Retired
Dr. Marvin Oxenham 	General Secretary (voice/no vote)	Director ICETE Academy
Dr. Joachim Pomrehn 	Voting AC Member	Director of Doctoral Programs CIU-German Branch
Mrs. Rana Wazir 	Voting AC Member	Registrar at ABTS
10.45 – 11.00: Internal Panel Meeting		

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS	Institution	Programmes
11.00 – 11.45: Visiting Evaluation Team Members (reviews Jan – May 2022)		
Mrs. Grace Al- Zoughbi (Student Representative) 	January 2022: PARS Theological College (UK)	Level 5 partial/Short Cycle partial Level 5/Short Cycle
Mrs. Katharina Penner (Team member) 	March 2022 EEBC Oradea (Romania)	Level 7/Second Cycle Concept Accreditation
Mr. Caleb Hutcherson (Team Leader) 	April 2022 Bibelschule Brake	Level 6/First Cycle
11.45 – 12.00 Internal Panel Meeting		

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS	Institution	Programmes
12.00 – 12.45: Institutional Representatives (Reviews Jan – May 22)		
Dr. Mariet Mikaelian, Internal Review Manager 	January 2022: PARS Theological College (UK)	Level 5 partial/Short Cycle Partial Level 5/Short Cycle
Dr. Marius Ban, President 	March 2022 Eastern European Bible College, Oradea (Romania)	Level 7/Second Cycle Concept Accreditation
Mr. Stephanus Schäl Internal Review Manager 	April 2022 Bibelschule Brake, Lemgo, Germany	Level 6/First Cycle
12.45 – 14.15 LUNCH		

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS	ECTE Role	Role outside ECTE
14.15 – 14.30 Internal Panel Meeting		
14.30 – 15.15 ECTE Council		
Mrs. Silke Brohl	 Vice-Chairwoman & Treasurer	Chairwoman of VMBB (Verband der Mennonitischen Brüdergemeinden Bayerns) Church Elder, Burghausen, Germany
Mrs. Carmen Crouse	 Accreditation Director (voice/no vote)	
Dr. Frank Hinkelmann		Chairman, European Evangelical Alliance (multiple ECTE HEI's)
Dr. Marcel Macelaru		Professor of Theology, Aurel Vlaicu University, Arad, Romania.
Dr. Marvin Oxenham	 General Secretary (voice/no vote)	Director ICETE Academy
Ms Irimi Panteliou	 Student Representative	Greek Bible College, Pikermi, Greece
Dr. Steffen Schulte	 Chairman	Rector TS Rheinland, Wölmersen, Germany
Dr. Alexander Stavnichuk		Lutheran Pastor & program director post-graduate studies at Theologisches Seminar Adelshofen (TSA), Germany; former Director of TSA
Dr. Külli Töniste		Rector Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary, Tallin, Estonia
15.15 – 16.00 Internal Panel Meeting		

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS	ROLE
16.00: Final Session	
Mrs. Carmen Crouse	 Accreditation Director
Dr. Marvin Oxenham	 General Secretary
Dr. Steffen Schulte	 Chairman