



# EQ-Arts

## Internal Quality Assurance

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## Introduction

EQ-Arts is an autonomous, independent, not-for-profit external quality assurance agency for higher arts education. EQ-Arts is legally established as a Foundation (Stichting), following a process formally concluded in Amsterdam (Netherlands) on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2015. EQ-Arts, along with its purpose and statutes, is registered in Amsterdam at the Chamber of Commerce<sup>1</sup>. Its current seat of operation is in Amsterdam.

EQ-Arts firmly holds to its independence, both as an organisation and in its activities, since it believes this is necessary to best be able to enhance and guarantee the quality of Higher Arts Education.

EQ-Arts **mission** is to support higher arts education institutions through its provision of external review of their internal self-evaluation processes and the enhancement of their quality systems, as well as advising on the enhancement of their provision, with the aim of promoting a strong quality culture across the European higher arts education sector.

## Quality Goals and Values

EQ-Arts embraces the principles that underpin the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) across the EHEA:

- Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance;
- Quality Assurance should be responsive to the diversity of higher education systems, institutions, programmes and students;
- Quality Assurance processes should support the development of a quality culture;
- Quality Assurance processes should take into account the needs and expectations of students, other stakeholders and society more widely.

Building on these principles, EQ-Arts regards itself as a learning organisation that demands of itself the highest degree of quality in terms of **professionalism, transparency** and the **development of a supportive quality culture** both in regard to its internal processes as an organisation and externally in dealing with clients, partners and the public.

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<sup>1</sup> Kamer van Koophandel 63775751

## Organisational Structure and Management

EQ-Arts has its two independent areas of activity:

- Assessment and Accreditation
- Enhancement

To carry out its activities and achieve its quality goals it has a clearly defined operational management structure.

### Board

The EQ-Arts Board is the management body of the Foundation and is ultimately responsible for all decision-making on matters of organisation, assessment and accreditation, and for the commissioning of actions in relation to the operation of EQ-Arts. The EQ-Arts Board acts with complete independence from any other external influence, including governments (given its non-governmental status) and other stakeholders. The Board approves the annual report and the annual accounts, the financial plan, the organisational strategic five-year plan, the operational plan, as well as a plan of activities pertaining to its core processes. The Board also annually appoints auditors. The Board is comprised of at least five members. Members must have the required skills to support the mission of the Foundation, be able to assist it to achieve its quality goals and steer it towards excellence in the field. They must have a deep knowledge of, and longstanding experience, in the field of international Quality Assurance and Enhancement in Higher Education.

The Board acts as the **Accreditation Council**, with sole responsibility for the final decision making in assessment and accreditation review processes.

The Board's decisions, and the basis for these decisions, are accessible to the public, with both the accreditation decisions and the reports published on the EQ-Arts website.

### Executive Group

The Executive Group (EG) is comprised of the six founding members of EQ-Arts. These are senior academics and managers with a long history of engagement in higher arts education and cultural arts organisations across Europe and globally.

The EG works closely with the Executive Office and reports to the Board. The EG is responsible for planning, developing and delivering all enhancement activities.

The EG makes recommendations to the Board about the development of EQ-Arts, its principles, guidelines and practices, including the process of critical self-evaluation of its own practices<sup>2</sup>.

Based on recommendations made by the EG, both new and additional members of the EG are approved by the Board. All new members must have longstanding experience in international QA&E in Higher Art Education.

### Executive Office

The Executive Office comprises of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and General Manager, who are both appointed by the Board and who are responsible for the management and day-to-day organisation of the agency, as determined by the Board.

The Executive Office co-ordinates, guides, supports and documents all external activities of EQ-Arts relating to its core processes as well as internal processes such as committee or working group meetings.

### Expert Peer-Review Register

The Executive Office maintains a regularly-updated Peer-Review Register of trained experts. The register is comprised of a pool of selected international peer-experts who collectively represent a broad spectrum of study fields within the arts and who represent a range of academic and management experience. The Executive Group selects experts to join the Register once they have successfully completed the EQ-Arts training programme. From this register, the Accreditation Council commissions a team of experts with discipline knowledge and skills appropriate to the specific needs of the institution/programme(s) undergoing the formal accreditation review.

The Board reviews the register every two years. Peer-experts are asked if they wish to remain on the register and, if so, to inform the Board about their activities in QA&E processes during the previous two years. Based on this information the Board will decide upon their continued inclusion on the register.

### Appeals Committee

The Appeals Committee is an independent group of three experts (with substitutes if necessary) drawn from the Peer-Review Register by the Board to address any complaints or appeals by an institution/programme regarding the accreditation process.

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<sup>2</sup> See section 4 of this document: *Review and Development of Core Processes*.

No member of the Committee can have participated in the assessment or any enhancement process undertaken with the complainant institution. The definition of *Complaints* and *Appeals* and the procedure are outlined in the *Appeals and Complaints Criteria and Procedure*<sup>3</sup>.

### Personnel Management

New staff joining the Executive Office and/or the Executive Group are selected according to the range of competencies and experience necessary to fulfil the goals of the organisation. EQ-Arts staff members are motivated and encouraged to engage in professional development. Appointments are made by the CEO in accordance with the strategic plan and budget approved by the Board.

The Executive Group makes proposals for new members to the CEO. Staff have opportunity to take part in training and development activities in order to enhance their knowledge in international external QA. There are regular staff appraisals with the CEO which are recorded.

### Internal and External Communication

EQ-Arts keeps digital records as well as paper copies of minutes, reports and key documentation of its core processes. For internal communication it employs e-mail, file sharing platforms (such as Dropbox) as well as video conferencing tools (such as Skype). All meetings are prepared with agendas, relevant documentation and minutes are kept.

EQ-Arts communicates with the public via its homepage ([www.eq-arts.org](http://www.eq-arts.org)), which includes published documentation of its work (reports of assessment and accreditation reviews), a public schedule of its activities and news items.

Staff, members of the Board and EG regularly participate as panel members and speakers at international conferences, workshops and seminars pertaining to issues of QA&E.

### IT/Infrastructure

EQ-Arts uses an up-to-date IT infrastructure for digital work and data storage. It offers an efficient working environment as well as tele-working opportunities for its staff and members.

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<sup>3</sup> Available on [www.eq-arts.org](http://www.eq-arts.org)

## Core Processes

### 3.1 Assessment and Accreditation Reviews

#### Aims and Quality Goals

EQ-Arts upholds its values guided by the following **beliefs** in carrying out its activities through:

- placing particular emphasis on the enhancement of a student learning experience that supports students to become creative mediators in today's rapidly changing societies and art communities;
- promoting student-centred approaches to learning, teaching and assessment;
- encouraging the constructive alignment of teaching and learning activities, and assessment tasks;
- encouraging institutions to develop and enhance a quality culture which guides their mission and vision;
- adopting a review methodology based on peer review, in which the participation of students, relevant professional bodies and/or employers as stakeholders is embedded;
- ensuring that explicit criteria and transparent processes underpin all its activities;
- ensuring that its processes are open to external scrutiny;
- recognising a range of external and international reference points and/or criteria (primarily guided by the ESG 2015);
- ensuring that the outcomes of its processes have formal status, are decided independently and are publicly available.

In order to deliver a high-quality process that adheres to EQ-Arts core values and beliefs the following QA&E measures are carried out in Assessment and Accreditation Reviews.

#### Preliminary Information and Contract

Once an institution expresses its interest in having a quality review carried out, the Executive Office will co-ordinate a preliminary information visit to the institution in order to establish clarity with the institution about the goals and scope of the process.

Before starting a review, a contract will be signed confirming the goals and scope of the review, the time frame, the responsibilities of both partners, as well as cost and billing arrangements. The contract is signed by EQ-Arts CEO and an authorised signatory on behalf of the institution.

### Selection of the Peer Review Panel

The Board, with guidance from the Executive Office, will select the Chairperson of the review panel, from the current EQ-Arts Peer-Review Register, who has the necessary experience to fulfil the role of a Chair as specified in the *Code of Conduct and Composition of the Evaluation Teams*<sup>4</sup>.

In collaboration with the Executive Office, the Chair will propose the other members of the Review Team, also drawn from the Peer-Review Register, to the Board. The Chair may decide to appoint individual members to specific areas of the review according to their expertise and experience, or in light of the structure or specific circumstances of the subject institution.

The institution may challenge the Boards decision to include specific members of a proposed panel if they believe that there is a conflict of interest (see *Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form*<sup>5</sup>).

Student members are not required to have taken part in the Expert Training provided by EQ-Arts, but will receive support and guidance from the Chair on their role and responsibility.

### Training of the Peer Review Panel

In order to ensure the highest degree of professionalism, EQ-Arts demands that all members of a review panel have previously completed the training programme provided by EQ-Arts.

The exclusive employment of EQ-Arts trained experts guarantees that each participant:

- is familiar with the relevant aspects of the ESG for Quality Assurance in the EHEA
- is trained in evidence gathering and analysis, allied to the development of strategic approaches for the evaluation of internal QA&E processes
- is prepared to work in international external peer-review QA&E process (including the elements of preparation, intensity of workload, complexity of task, etc.)
- has the communication and teamwork skills required in the specific context of international external QA review processes
- is able to formulate and frame a set of recommendations and commendations as a precursor to the drafting of a report.

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<sup>4</sup> Both documents available on [www.eq-arts.org](http://www.eq-arts.org)

<sup>5</sup> Available on [www.eq-arts.org](http://www.eq-arts.org)



## Self-Evaluation Report (SER)

The production of the SER is guided by the EQ–Arts *Guidelines for a Self-Evaluation Report*. In this process, EQ-Arts is highly conscious to balance the need for clarity and evidence with the demands associated with the production of additional documentation and associated issues of translation for the institution.

The institution is provided with an EQ-Arts SER template that covers each of the current ESG standards. This is augmented by series of questions in each section of the template, designed to ensure that the review process covers the particular issues and demands of higher art education as set out in the core beliefs of EQ-Arts. The SER template encourages the institution to discuss how it has dealt with past challenges and to demonstrate any recent improvements it has instigated.

The Chair will establish clear lines of communication between the institution, the Executive Office, and themselves as a liaison person with the Review Team.

## On-Site Visit(s)

The visit(s) to the institution will be carried out in accordance to the EQ-Arts *Codes and Statements* and the EQ-Arts *Review Procedures*<sup>6</sup> which consist of an extensive range of protocols that guide communication, scheduling, evidence gathering, note-taking and documentation and the collegiate comportment of the team, both within its membership and in respect of the institution.

Each visit concludes with oral feedback which outlines the major points that have been agreed by the Evaluation Team, which will be discussed in more detail within the subsequent written report.

## The Accreditation Report

The written reports produced by EQ-Arts provide a thorough, evidence-based, external appraisal of the institution, which seeks to balance commendations of institutional achievements and recommendations for further improvements of its Quality Culture. The reports also take full account of the national context of the institution and any other specific circumstances, to ensure that the report does not include external demands that it would be impossible for it to implement (for example actions that are inconsistent with the national laws or statutes that pertain to higher education).

EQ-Arts reports will always consider any steps that have already been taken by an institution in relation to quality assurance and enhancement while also identifying areas of necessary improvement and/or steps towards further enhancements. Reviews and reports will be written in a collegial tone with the intention of

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<sup>6</sup> All documents available on [www.eq-arts.org](http://www.eq-arts.org)

supporting and encouraging the further development of an institutions quality culture.

Each finding determined by the review is substantiated within the information provided by the institution (including the SER and its appendices) and/or evidence gathered during the panels discussions with the groups of staff, students, graduates and stakeholders during the on-site visits.

Review reports are written by, and agreed upon, by all the members of the Evaluation Team. Decisions regarding any conditions and recommendations that are to be included in the report should be agreed unanimously. If any individual member of the team finds that they cannot support a decision regarding any of the conditions and recommendations they can elect to formulate a substantiated note of dissent to the Board.

Institutions will have opportunity to read a draft copy of the report and comment on any matters of factual error before a final version of the report is submitted to the EQ-Arts Accreditation Council.

Institutions have a right to ask for sensitive information to be redacted in the final report before it is published.

### Accreditation Decisions

The Accreditation Council will base its decisions concerning recommendations, conditions and accreditation on the basis of the recommendations as set out in the report they receive from the Review Panels.

It is the responsibility of the Accreditation Council to ensure that any conditions and recommendations arrived at by Review Panels are evidence-based and have been arrived at through the written material (SER, Strategic Plan, Institutional Policies, minutes of meetings, etc.) presented prior to, during, or subsequent to the site visit and/or through the series of meetings held with key stakeholders. The Accreditation Council is ultimately responsible for the guardianship of the principles, guidelines and practices employed by EQ-Arts in its assessments and accreditations.

After the set period for making formal appeals has lapsed, the outcomes of the accreditation process and the final reports will be published on the EQ-Arts website.

### Follow-Up Procedure

The accreditation decision and the final report will include clear information about any conditions that have been set and the evidence that will need to be provided to show that such conditions have been met, and the time frame within which this needs to be completed. The institution will inform EQ-Arts about the actions it has undertaken in response to such conditions and an analysis of the impact these

actions have had in regard to the specified conditions confirmed by the Accreditation Council.

To support this process EQ-Arts has developed a template for institutions to complete. Once the institution provides this information and/or evidence the Review Team will recommend to the Accreditation Council to lift a condition or, if this process is not met by the institution within the set time-frame, to end the period of accreditation.

Assessment Reviews may include a follow-up procedure if it has been agreed and included in the contract.

Follow-Up Procedures are outlined in the *Process for Follow-Up Procedures*<sup>7</sup>.

### Appeal

EQ-Arts has established procedures for the Appeals Committee which are designed to guarantee that it works as an independent group to address any complaints or appeals by an institution during the accreditation process. The definition of *Complaints* and *Appeals* and the procedure are outlined in the *Appeals and Complaints Criteria and Procedure*.<sup>8</sup>

### Feedback

In order to develop and enhance its own processes, EQ-Arts has developed a feedback form to gather input from institutions. The forms are sent out by the Executive Office and shared with the review panel and the Executive Group.

### Collaborating with Agencies and National QA&E Entities

EQ-Arts is open to collaborate and work with EQAR registered agencies and national QA&E entities in order to develop QA&E methodologies and tools within the sector as well as carrying out joint Assessment and Accreditation Reviews.

In such cases a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) will be drawn up signed by both parties. The MoA will provide clarity about the division of work load, cost sharing, requirements for the expertise panel members, the process by which panel members will be selected, the guidelines, templates and processes that will be used, as well which accreditation body will make the final decision regarding accreditation.

Both agencies and national entities will be asked to evaluate the process and give feedback to EQ-Arts in order to develop and enhance its own processes.

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<sup>7</sup> Available on [www.eq-arts.org](http://www.eq-arts.org)

<sup>8</sup> Available on [www.eq-arts.org](http://www.eq-arts.org)

In case of agencies and national QA& entities that are not registered by EQAR or have not fully and consistently adopted the ESG, a memorandum of agreement will be signed that ensures that the process delivered by EQ-Arts will adhere to the ESG and in accordance to its internal standards for Quality Assurance.

EQ-Arts is open to recommend experts for review panels out of its Register of Peer-Experts to other EQAR registered agencies as a means of heightening the quality of external QA&E processes in the sector and to maintain collegial relationships with other agencies and entities. Experts will be asked to share examples of best practice with the Executive Office in order to be included in the review and development of its own methodology and processes.

## 3.2 Enhancement Activities

### Aims and Quality Goals

EQ-Arts Enhancement activities aim to support individual higher arts education institutions in the self-evaluation and enhancement of their internal quality systems in order to help them foster a strong internal quality culture. EQ-Arts aims to make Quality Assurance and Enhancement matters fully comprehensible for all staff members and the student body. To facilitate this EQ-Arts offers a range of Enhancement activities that can be made available to individual institutions, to the wider international higher arts education sector, and to national Higher Education Agencies and Ministries.

### Support of Enhancement Activity

In order to ensure consistency and the highest standard of delivery the Executive Office co-ordinates all non-assessment/accreditation enhancement activities.

- It liaises with clients about the content and issues to be addressed
- it selects trainers and consultants from the Executive Group
- it approves and documents, and all training and consultancy materials which will be used by trainers and consultants
- it liaises with the institution about matters of logistics and billing

### Feedback

In order to develop and enhance its process EQ-Arts has developed feedback forms to gather input by the institutions. The forms are sent out by the Executive Office and are shared with the trainer or consultant and the Executive Group.

## Review and Development of Core Processes

In order to enhance its core processes the Executive Group regularly reviews all published guidelines, templates, training and consulting material as well as the internal QA&E measures described in this document.

To this end the EG establishes working groups, on a bi-annual basis, who review EQ-Arts processes in relation to relevant external parameters (such as the ESG, EQF, national QA&E frameworks and guidelines), examples of international best practice in external QA&E and the feedback gathered from institutions and clients. The working groups set up by the EG may include external experts as necessary.

The working groups report to the EG, which formulates recommendations for amendments and changes to processes, documents and materials, which are presented to the EQ-Arts Board for approval.

EQ-Arts internal and external QA&E processes are periodically reviewed externally in accordance to EQAR regulations.