

# Association for Transnational Higher Education Accreditation (ATHEA)

## Organizational Development Frequently Asked Questions Guide

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### **Accreditation**

|   | <b>QUESTION</b>   | <b>RESPONSE</b>  |
|---|---|--|
| 1 | Can the Founding Members have a "guarantee" to become accredited within the 4 years that they pay the 24,000 €?                 | We cannot have any guarantees like this. Such a guarantee would make us no more than an accreditation mill, and preclude us from being included on EQAR. We will not lower the standards to ensure or guarantee accreditation.   |
| 2 | If an institution has any concerns, can peer members send a mentor/tutor to help them through accreditation?                    | We will work with every institution to help them become accredited; however, achieving accreditation is really up to the institution in that the institution must achieve the standards.   |
| 3 | Will the ideas for continuous improvement noted during the site visits be shared for accreditation assistance to other members? | If the continuous improvement is about the accreditation process and standards for ATHEA the answers is, yes. But, if you are talking about "Institutional Best Practices" these would only be shared with the permission of the institution being reviewed. Our intention is that we will share best practices just as most other accreditation organizations do. |

## ATHEA Organizational Development Frequently Asked Questions Guide

### Financial

|   | QUESTION  | RESPONSE   |
|---|---|--|
| 4 | From the framework document, it would appear that the annual investment for the Founding Members of ATHEA is expected be 6,000 € for the next four years. Could you confirm if this understanding is correct or not please? | <p>For the Founding Members, the initial investment of 24,000 € is paid 6,000 € for each of 4 years. That fee covers the membership, accreditation maintenance, and the accreditation costs (includes expenses that would traditionally be pre-approved and reimbursed by the institution, but not travel costs for the site visit) for the entire start-up Phase (4 years).</p> <p>The total fees for that four-year period if paid individually would be 3,000 + 15,000 + 3,000 + 3,000 + 3,000 + 2,000 = 29,000 €.</p>  |
| 5 | After the four years what would be the annual membership dues for the Founding Members?   | <p>If a Founding Member is still in the Institutional Member or candidacy stage, the annual cost per year for a member institution is 3,000 €.</p> <p>Once a member is accredited, the annual cost per year for the accredited member includes a 2,000 € accreditation maintenance fee for a total cost 5,000 €/year.</p> <p>The annual cost per year for a member institution joining after July 2015 is 4,000 €. The cost of accreditation is 15,000 €.</p> <p>Once a member is accredited, the annual cost per year for the accredited member includes a 2,000 € accreditation maintenance fee for a total cost 5,000 €/year.</p> |

## ATHEA Organizational Development Frequently Asked Questions Guide

### Governance

|   | QUESTION   | RESPONSE   |
|---|--|--|
| 6 | What is the legislative imperative for the creation of ATHEA?                                | <p>Key to understanding our effort is differentiating between our proposed institutional accreditation organization and programmatic accreditation. In Switzerland, for example, a law that went into effect on January 1st specifically requires institutions of higher education to become institutionally accredited by an entity that is on the EQAR within the next 6 years.</p> <p>The only option in Switzerland the Swiss Center of Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education and the research component is not feasible for privately owned institutions. These schools must find an alternative and that alternative must be on the EQAR register. Yes, these schools have programmatic accreditation (e.g. ACBSP), but that accreditation is not enough for the Swiss government even if entities like ACBSP were on the EQAR register because <i>institutional</i> is not the same as <i>programmatic</i> accreditation. ATHEA is being developed to meet this identified need.</p>  |
| 7 | What time frame are we looking at for ATHEA to meet all requirements for membership of EQAR? | <p>Before we seek EQAR recognition ATHEA must be in existence for a minimum of 2 years and have a minimum of 15 accredited members. Thus, it will be at least 2 years before we can apply for the EQAR Register. The application requires a self-study and site visit. That process will take at least a year, perhaps longer. Thus, we anticipate that it will take at least 3 years before we are on the EQAR Register, perhaps longer depending upon a variety of external factors.</p> <p>Our goal is to create ATHEA based on the specific European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG), so we can meet the above timeframe. The first year will focus on document preparation (by-laws, accreditation philosophy, accreditation manual, site visit guidelines, etc.). The second year will focus on conducting the site visits and helping schools complete the accreditation self-study. The third year is when we will apply for EQAR recognition, but that depends on how many accredited members we have through the accreditation process.</p> |

## ATHEA Organizational Development Frequently Asked Questions Guide

### Governance continued

|    | QUESTION  | RESPONSE  |
|----|---|---|
| 8  | Can the site visit evaluators include locals/Europeans?   | Yes, that is our intention. The vast majority will be European and will mostly be drawn from the membership. All site evaluators must be trained and certified before being assigned to a site evaluation team. There is a requirement, in the ESG, that a student be part of the evaluation teams and they will also come from member institutions. Therefore, we look to conduct evaluator training within the first 2 years after ATHEA is established. We do have several trained site evaluators on staff to assist.   |
| 9  | Can the Founding Members send at least one person on a site visit to another accreditation candidate?   | Non-site team observers will be allowed to go on a site evaluation visit with the permission of the institution being visited. Since site teams are going to be made up of personnel from member institutions it is very likely that representatives from the founding members will make up most of the first evaluation team. The site evaluators will be trained accordingly.   |
| 10 | What happens if ATHEA is denied recognition by ENQA/EQAR?   | <p>We would determine what deficiencies were identified in the ENQA/EQAR review and form a plan to rectify the deficiencies and reapply as soon as possible. Since our developmental plan is to build ATHEA around the ESG, we expect to have success on the first attempt.</p> <p>What we have to keep in mind is that if we say we are doing something then we must be able to demonstrate that it is occurring. It is most important that we follow our own standards and practices so that we are open, transparent, and objective with sound governance and operating principles, which is why we are sometimes dogmatic with our responses regarding any deviation of best practices.</p> |
| 11 | What happens if this organization ceases to exist after 3 or 4 years? What are the consequences for institutions that have started the process? | The reason that Founding Members are being recruited is to insure that ATHEA will be an accrediting body for the long-term benefit of its members. With a sound financial foundation, ATHEA will be a success.  |

## ATHEA Organizational Development Frequently Asked Questions Guide

### Membership

|    | QUESTION   | RESPONSE   |
|----|--|--|
| 12 | What will be the Founding Members' status once ATHEA achieves EQAR recognition? Will they have a special status and a vote with a higher weight? | The status will be no different from other accredited members. The vote will be the same. This is a best practice and part of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) set out by ENQA and EQAR requires this ESF to be followed. All members will be treated equally.  |
| 13 | Can persons and organizations/associations or businesses become members of ATHEA?  | In time, yes. We will most likely have a corporate and/or individual membership status so that organizations, associations, and individuals can become affiliated with ATHEA. This will be in the by-laws and in the Accreditation manual.   |
| 14 | We are an online only institution. Can we become a Founding Member of ATHEA?   | Yes, provided that you meet the qualifications including years of operation and have past graduates of the programs. We are not restricting membership to only campus-based or blended/hybrid institutions. The criteria for membership and accreditation will be set down in the Accreditation Manual. That said, the criteria will be the same regardless of the delivery modality of the academic program.  |
| 15 | What exactly are the qualifications to be a Founding Member of ATHEA?  | In order to be included on EQAR, ATHEA must be operational for at least 2 years and have at least 15 accredited members. Therefore, we are seeking Founding Members who are very likely to obtain the institutional accreditation within the start-up period. To be a Founding Member, you must be authorization to operate as an educational institution in your country, have been in operations for at least 3 years, and have graduates of your program. |
| 16 | My institution is not located in Europe. Can I still join ATHEA as a Founding Member?  | Most likely yes, but it depends on your location. Our focus is on Europe and Western Asia. We are also open to considering reputable institutions from Africa and the Middle East since we realize that many schools within these areas face similar issues with institutional accreditation and recognition that the European schools face.   |
| 17 | Can we get a refund on our dues if we are not able to become accredited?   | No. Just like with any reputable accreditation entity, it is up to you to become accredited by meeting the standards put forth by the accreditation organization's documents.  |

## ATHEA Organizational Development Frequently Asked Questions Guide

### Membership continued

|    | QUESTION   | RESPONSE  |
|----|--|---|
| 18 | You mention membership, candidacy, and accreditation status. We understand that you have not developed the specific standards yet, but can you give us some idea of the requirements for each level? | <p>Yes, but this is in the planning stage, so please understand that these are generally excepted standards. Once the organization is formed there will be a group recruited from the membership to help in the codification of these requirements. Considerations are subject to refinement based upon our pursuit to be included on EQAR. At this time, these are the requirements to become a member:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Institutional Membership. Must have the authority to operate as an educational institution, have students in an academic program, be in existence for at least 1 year, and offer and teach their own institution's programs. For example, if an institution is teaching for another institution but has no programs of their own, they could not be an Institutional member.</li> <li>b) Candidacy for Accreditation. Member who has completed all of the requirements for candidacy status as stated in the accreditation standards manual. Must have graduates of the program and be in existence for at least 3 years.</li> <li>c) Accredited. Candidate for Accreditation who completes a self-study, passes a site evaluation, and is voted into accreditation status by the ATHEA Board of Commissioners. Must have at least 2 years of graduates from their institution.</li> </ul> |
| 19 | As a Founding Member, can I prevent an institution from becoming a member for subjective reasons?  | No.   |
| 20 | Does my institution have to be accredited before I can become a member of ATHEA?   | No, but you must have the authority to operate as an educational institution, have students in an academic program, be in existence for at least 1 year, and offer and teach your own institution's programs. The purpose of ATHEA is for you to subsequently obtain institutional accreditation that allows you then to obtain programmatic accreditation.   |

## ATHEA Organizational Development Frequently Asked Questions Guide

### Membership continued

|    | QUESTION  | RESPONSE  |
|----|---|---|
| 21 | Are only business/management institutions eligible for ATHEA?   | No, any higher education institution could potentially be eligible for ATHEA. We have naturally focused on business/management institutions because it was business/management institutions that first identified the need. However, hospitality management schools, career technical schools, etc. are all potentially eligible for ATHEA.   |
| 22 | We are just forming our institution. Can we join as a Founding Member?  | No. You must be in existence for at least 1 year and have students enrolled in a program that is offer by your institution, to become a <i>member</i> of ATHEA. We are raising the qualifications for <i>Founding Members</i> to require at least 2 years with graduates, so that the Founding Members can relatively quickly become accredited, as we have a minimum of 15 needed for EQAR recognition.  |
| 23 | An institution wants to join ATHEA that I don't think has the quality of education that we want. Can you deny their participation with ATHEA? | No, provided that the school meets the minimum requirements for institutional membership. Then if an institution does not meet the standards to become a “Candidate for Accreditation” it will remain at the member level until it improves its quality by making changes to meet the standards.<br><br>Remember, membership does not guarantee accreditation – every institution has to meet the same academic and operational quality standards as everyone else to become accredited.  |
| 24 | Why are your standards for acceptance as a Founding Member higher than for a regular member?  | This is due to our need to have at least 15 accredited members in order to seek EQAR recognition. Therefore, we must have Founding Members who are more established in terms of years of operations, students, and graduates so that the institutional accreditation will move forward more quickly. Our goal is to have at least 15 accredited members within 3 years, so we need Founding Members who are familiar with the educational process, and who have policies and procedures that they can show they are following to demonstrate compliance with ATHEA standards. |

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**Membership continued**

|    | <b>QUESTION</b>   | <b>RESPONSE</b>   |
|----|---|---|
| 25 | We are a public (state-owned) school. I know your focus is on privately-owned schools, but can we still join ATHEA and pursue your accreditation since it would help us attract international students? | Yes, of course. The accreditation processes and standards are the same regardless of ownership of the school. |



## ATHEA Organizational Development Frequently Asked Questions Guide

### Structure

|    | QUESTION   | RESPONSE   |
|----|--|--|
| 28 | Can the Founding Members have the status of "Candidate for Accreditation" after signing up as they will anyway go for accreditation and this label is of a very high level of recognition in Europe? | No, we must follow the rules associated with candidate status. This will be covered in the Accreditation Manual and covered in greater detail in the Candidacy Evaluation Manual and the Accreditation Self Study Manual. These manuals will be developed after the organization is officially formed. We will not obtain EQAR recognition unless each step of the accreditation process is followed for all applicants. We cannot deviate from these standards.   |
| 29 | Although the EQAR requirement is to have at least 15 accredited institutions, you are seeking at least 20 Founding Members. Why are you trying to obtain more member schools than you need?          | Unfortunately, not every Founding Member may become accredited within the timeframe that we need. Membership is not a guarantee for accreditation. With at least 20 Founding Members, we are hopeful that at least 15 of these schools will become accredited within the initial 2-3 years.  |
| 30 | Are the EQAR standards that will be used for ATHEA difficult to achieve?   | The by-laws and accreditation standards will be developed to ensure that ATHEA will comply with the standards set forth in the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) that EQAR uses to ensure a quality accrediting body. The most recent version of the ESG, that is still under review, can be found at <a href="http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/ESG_3edition-2.pdf">http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/ESG_3edition-2.pdf</a> .                            |
| 31 | How is ATHEA different from ECBE? Are you going to be equivalent to ECBE or going for full ENQA recognition?   | ECBE does not have EQAR recognition and is not recognized as an institutional accreditation granting entity. ECBE's focus is with business schools whereas our focus with ATHEA is on all higher education institutions. Our goal is to qualify to be an affiliate member of ENQA, to do this we must comply with ESG by completing a self-evaluation and have a peer review visit for ATHEA, thus a higher order of recognition than ECBE. To be a full member of ENQA an agency must be a governmental body. |

## ATHEA Organizational Development Frequently Asked Questions Guide

### Structure continued

|    | QUESTION   | RESPONSE  |
|----|--|---|
| 32 | How is ATHEA different from IACBE and ACBSP?       | ATHEA is to be an <i>institutional</i> accrediting body, while IACBE and ACBSP are <i>programmatic</i> accrediting bodies. The main difference is that IACBE and ACBSP focus on the delivery of a specific discipline; in the case of IACBE and ACBSP it is business/management education. As an institutional accreditor, ATHEA accredits the institution that may offer many disciplines. The focus of an institutional accreditor is around the administrative processes and operational areas, in addition to the academic quality. |
| 33 | Have you decided upon a name for the organization? | We have decided upon a name for the organization: The <b>A</b> ssociation for <b>T</b> ransnational <b>H</b> igher <b>E</b> ducation <b>A</b> ccreditation ( <b>ATHEA</b> ). The name reflects our strategic goal with regard to having a European-based institutional accreditation entity that meets the standards set out in the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG) is accepted by ENQA and required to be followed by EQAR to be included on the register.   |