

Principles of Good Practice for an External Quality Assurance (EQA) Agency

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1. The Mission Statement

The EQA agency has an explicit mission statement or set of objectives **that takes into account the cultural and historical context of the agency**. The statement makes clear that EQA is a major activity of the agency and that there exists a systematic approach to achieving the mission or objectives. There is evidence that the mission statement is translated into a clear policy and management plan.

2. Decision-making

The EQA agency carries out its assessments in relation both to the institution's own self-analysis and to external references. It respects institutional integrity and autonomy, while being supportive of the institution. The agency evinces independent, impartial, rigorous, thorough, fair, and consistent decision-making. There is evidence that no party has untoward influence on the outcomes of the decisions. Independence of the evaluators is guaranteed.

The agency makes consistent decisions, even if the judgments are formed by different groups, panels, teams, or committees.

If the external evaluation leads to an accreditation, the accreditation framework and standards are public, and the criteria for accreditation clearly formulated. The rules leading to an accreditation decision are transparent, public, and guarantee an equal treatment. If relevant, the agency distinguishes between accreditation (threshold) and extension (improvement).

3. Resources

The EQA agency has adequate and credible resources, both human and financial, to be able to organize and run the process of external evaluation **in an effective and efficient manner**, with appropriate provision for development.

4. Documentation

The EQA agency has clear documentation concerning the self-evaluation and the external evaluation.

The documentation is publicly available.

The documentation concerning the self-evaluation indicates to the institutions of higher education what is expected of the self-evaluation, distinguishing clearly between recommendations and requirements.

The documentation for external evaluation set out the matters covered in these Principles, such as the standards used, the decision criteria, the assessing methods, the reporting format, etc.

The documents indicate clearly what the EQA agency expects from the institution. Those expectations are adequate for an institution of higher education or its core activities.

The documents for EQA assure clearly that each institution or part of it (e.g., subject area) will be evaluated in an equivalent way, even if the external review panels are different.

5. The External Committee

Where the EQA agency uses external panels, teams, or committees, the system clearly ensures that:

- The composition of the committee is adequate
- There are no conflicts of interest
- The committee is instructed clearly about the task
- The committee acts independently

6. The Public Face

In its work, the EQA agency includes, informs, and responds to the public. This includes making public and explicit its policies, procedures, and criteria.

The agency also demonstrates public accountability by reporting openly on its institutional review decisions, making the outcomes of the evaluation public in an appropriate way. The content of the public report may differ depending on the cultural context and will also depend on the requirements set for accountability.

7. System of Appeal

The EQA agency provides a method for appeals against its decisions.

8. Quality Assurance of the EQA Agency

The EQA agency has a system for quality assurance of its own activities, emphasizing flexibility (in response to the changing nature of higher education) and quality improvements.

The agency carries out self-review, based on data collected and analysis, including consideration of its own effects and value. **The agency commissions external reviews, and there is evidence that the results are used.**

9. Collaboration with Other Agencies

As far as possible, the EQA agency collaborates with other EQAs.

10. The Relation between the EQA Agency and Higher Education Institutions

The EQA agency:

- Recognizes that quality and quality assurance are primarily the responsibility of the higher education institutions themselves
- Respects the autonomy, identity, and integrity of the institution
- Only applies standards that have been developed in consultation with all stakeholders making its quality determinations
- Aims to contribute to both quality improvement and accountability