

INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice

Preface

The *Guidelines of Good Practice* are the work of quality assurance agencies from over 65 countries dedicated to ensuring that higher education students throughout the world have access to high quality education. The implementation of these guidelines has the potential to improve the lives of people young and old, in all continents and regions.

The *Guidelines* are designed to be used by all quality assurance agencies, whatever their stage of development.

The original *Guidelines of Good Practice* were published in 2003 and were revised in 2006. This revision of the *Guidelines of Good Practice* reflects the experience of institutions, programs, and reviewers that have used the 2003 version. It is intended to continue the INQAAHE process of continuous improvement. Comments on the *Guidelines* may be sent to the INQAAHE Secretariat at any time.

It is dangerous to plan on the basis of predicting the speed of change, but currently the Board of INQAAHE envisages reviewing the *Guidelines* for possible significant revision only about every five years. Within that cycle, small changes could be made every two years as necessary. This will give agencies a consistent tool to use over a period of time.

The INQAAHE Board of Directors wishes to thank all those who have participated in this revision, particularly Dorte Kristoffersen, Marie Jose LeMaitre, and Richard Lewis (who comprised the working group), and Jean Avnet Morse, who chaired the process.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

- Rationale
- Using the Guidelines
- Reviews Against the Guidelines

SECTION I. THE EQAA: ACCOUNTABILITY, TRANSPARENCY, AND RESOURCES

1. The Governance of the EQAA
2. Resources
3. Quality Assurance of the EQAA
4. Reporting Public Information

SECTION II. INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE EQAA: RELATIONSHIP, STANDARDS, AND INTERNAL REVIEWS

5. The Relationship Between the EQAA and Higher Education Institutions
6. The EQAA's Requirements for Institutional/Program Performance
7. The EQAA's Requirements Institutional Self-Evaluation and Reporting to the EQAA

SECTION III. EQAA REVIEW OF INSTITUTIONS: EVALUATION, DECISION, AND APPEALS

8. The EQAA's Evaluation of the Institution and/or Program
9. Decisions
10. Appeals

SECTION IV. EXTERNAL ACTIVITIES: COLLABORATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES AND TRANSNATIONAL/CROSS-BORDER EDUCATION

11. Collaboration
12. Transnational/Cross-Border Higher Education

GUIDELINES OF GOOD PRACTICE

INTRODUCTION

While it is believed that the *Guidelines of Good Practice* will be of interest to all those who are concerned with quality assurance in higher education, they are specifically addressed to external quality assurance agencies (EQAAs). They are designed for use by EQAAs in all stages of development.

Rationale

The purpose of the *Guidelines* is to promote good practice for internal and/or external quality assurance. Specific goals include:

- Creating a framework to guide the creation of new EQAAs
- Providing criteria for use in the self and external evaluation of EQAAs
- Promoting professional development among EQAAs and their staff
- Promoting public accountability of EQAAs

As more agencies demonstrate how their procedures relate to the *Guidelines*, this will facilitate mutual understanding of how EQAAs operate, leading to greater possibilities for collaboration, and eventually an increase in mutual recognition of agencies' decisions.

The *Guidelines* will also be used as a basis for categorising entries in INQAAHE's Good Practice Database and as a context for the Information Clearinghouse

Using the Guidelines

When reading and working with the *Guidelines*, please consider the following:

- The Guidelines are intended to promote good practice and to assist an EQAA to improve its quality by building on existing experience.
- Each EQAA has evolved in a specific context and is influenced by cultural and historical factors.
- There are diverse approaches to, and purposes for, external quality evaluation (including but not restricted to accreditation, assessment and audit) and scope of evaluation (eg institutional and programmatic), but these approaches are based on some common principles. (The words "evaluation" and "review" are used as generic terms to include all types of external quality review.)
- The Guidelines should not lead to the dominance of one specific view or approach, but should help to promote good practice and eradicate bad practice.

Reviews Against the Guidelines

Since its establishment in 1991, INQAAHE has sought to help newly established agencies develop good practices, to help more established agencies to improve their practices, and to help all agencies build their capacity. The *Guidelines* contribute to all these goals. An EQAA may review itself and/or have an external review against the *Guidelines*. In this way, the

Guidelines can be used as aspirational goals and/or a measure of progress and/or as a measure of achievement. When undertaking or undergoing a review, a developing agency may emphasise suggestions for improvement. Alternatively an agency may wish to have a review that reaches conclusions relating to its adherence to the *Guidelines*.

In the case of a 'developmental review' (which might be most appropriate for a recently established agency), reviewers should probably pay particular attention to the direction of development being undertaken by the agency. In making recommendations, they should take into account possible restrictions on the agency's pace of development, and may advise on the amount of experience that should be accumulated before the agency's policies and processes are finalised.

Alternatively, an agency might wish for various reasons (such as sending a signal to its constituents or other agencies) to undertake or undergo an 'adherence review'. In this case, reviewers should state whether the EQAA meets each individual Guideline fully, substantially, partially, or fails to meet the Guideline. The report should indicate specific areas in which shortcomings were observed, and it should include suggestions for follow-up actions needed to address these.

As a service to members, INQAAHE will, at the member's request, record on the INQAAHE website any member agency that has been found to be comprehensively adhering to the *Guidelines*. For this purpose, an overall finding of adherence to the *Guidelines* requires substantial alignment with most of the individual *Guidelines*, which must include numbers 2 (resources), 3 (Quality Assurance of the EQAA), 4 (public reporting), 5 (the Relationship between the EQAA and Higher Education Institutions), 6 (institutional or programmatic performance), and 9 (decisions by the EQAA).

THE GUIDELINES OF GOOD PRACTICE

SECTION I. THE EQAA: ACCOUNTABILITY, TRANSPARENCY, AND RESOURCES

1. The Governance of the EQAA

The EQAA has a written mission statement or set of objectives that takes into account the cultural and historical context of the EQAA. The statement explicitly provides that external quality assurance is a major activity of the EQAA, and it requires a systematic approach to achieving the mission or objectives of the EQAA. There is evidence that the statement of objectives is implemented pursuant to a practical management plan that is linked to EQAA resources. The ownership and governance structure is appropriate for the objectives of the agency.

Examples of Sources of Evidence

- The ownership and governance structure
- Written mission statement and set of objectives
- Policy/strategy of the EQAA
- Management or long term strategic plan
- Vision statement
- Legislation

2. Resources

The EQAA has adequate and accessible human and financial resources to conduct external evaluation effectively and efficiently in accordance with its mission statement and its methodological approach. The EQAA's resources are also adequate for the appropriate development of the agency.

Examples of Sources of Evidence:

- Budget
- Financial statements
- Activities, tasks, workloads
- Fee structure
- Fees for external reviewers
- Average cost of external review
- Human resources profile (e.g. numbers and qualifications of decision-making body, external reviewers, and staff)

3. Quality Assurance of the EQAA

The EQAA has a system of continuous quality assurance of its own activities that emphasises flexibility in response to the changing nature of higher education, the effectiveness of its operations, and its contribution towards the achievement of its objectives.

The EQAA conducts internal self-review of its own activities, including consideration of its own effects and value. The review includes data and analysis.

The EQAA is subject to external reviews at regular intervals. There is evidence that any required actions are implemented and disclosed.

Examples of Sources of Evidence:

- Quality assurance policy/system/activities/plan
- Internal feedback (e.g. by staff supervisors or decision-making body)
- Self reviews
- Examples of ongoing internal processes for continuous quality assurance
- External feedback from institutions or other stakeholders
- Reports from external reviews
- Use of feedback from reviews for improvement

4. Reporting Public Information

The EQAA informs and responds to the public in accordance with applicable legislation and the cultural context of the EQAA. This includes full and clear disclosures of its relevant documentation such as policies, procedures and criteria.

The EQAA also demonstrates public accountability by reporting its decisions about higher education institutions and programs. The content and extent of reporting may vary with cultural context and applicable legal and other requirements.

If the external evaluation leads to a decision about the higher education institution or program, the procedures applied and the criteria for decision-making are public, and the criteria for review are transparent, public, and ensure equality of treatment.

The EQAA also discloses to the public the decisions about the EQAA resulting from any external review of its own performance.

Examples of Sources of Evidence:

- URL of EQAA website and short summary of the types of information provided here
- List of publications
- Press releases
- Other ways and means of informing the public, such as email or newsletter
- Public disclosure of external evaluations of the EQAA's performance

SECTION II. INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE EQAA: RELATIONSHIP, STANDARDS, AND INTERNAL REVIEWS

5. The Relationship Between the EQAA and Higher Education Institutions

The EQAA:

- recognises that institutional and programmatic quality and quality assurance are primarily the responsibility of the higher education institutions themselves;
- respects the academic autonomy, identity and integrity of the institutions or programs;
- applies standards or criteria that have been subject to reasonable consultation with stakeholders; and
- aims to contribute to both quality improvement and accountability of the institution.

Examples of Sources of Evidence:

- Policies/manuals
- Feedback from institutions and other stakeholders
- Reports from external reviews of the EQAA
- EQAA internal reviews

6. The EQAA's Requirements for Institutional/Program Performance

The EQAA has documents that indicate clearly what the EQAA expects of the institution. Those expectations (which may for example be called standards or factors or precepts) are appropriate for the core activities of an institution of higher education or program. The standards should explicitly address all areas of institutional activity that fall within the EQAA's scope, such as teaching, learning, research, community work, etc. and necessary resources such as finances, staff/faculty, and learning resources. Standards may refer to specific areas, levels of achievement, relative benchmarking and types of measures, and may provide general guidelines. They may also include specific learning goals.

Examples of Sources of Evidence:

- Standards or factors considered by the EQAA
- Types and levels of institutional and programmatic goals, including learning, public service, research, etc.
- Examples of measures
- Results of programmatic or institutional reviews
- Types of required institutional and programmatic resources
- Institutional strategic plans

7. The EQAA's Requirements Institutional Self-Evaluation and Reporting to the EQAA

The documentation concerning self-evaluation explains to the institutions of higher education the purposes, procedures, process and expectations in the self-evaluation process. The documents also include the standards used, the decision criteria, the reporting format, and other information needed by the higher education institution.

Typically, an EQAA review process includes a self-evaluation through self-study by the institution or program, external peer review, and a follow-up procedure.

As necessary and appropriate, the EQAA guides the institution or program in the application of the procedures of the quality assurance process, such as self-evaluation, external review, or solicitation of assessment/feedback from the public, students, and other constituents.

Examples of Sources of Evidence:

- Handbooks and other publications explaining processes and timelines for organising the process, identifying issues, gathering evidence, analysing performance, and reporting results
- List of training materials for institutions
- Past institutional or programmatic reports or self-studies
- Results of institutional or programmatic reviews
- Types of internal and external institutional assessment processes and results
- EQAA training or advisory materials for institutions and programs

SECTION III. EQAA REVIEW OF INSTITUTIONS: EVALUATION, DECISION, AND APPEALS

8. The EQAA's Evaluation of the Institution and/or Program

The EQAA has clear documentation concerning the external evaluation that states the standards used, assessment methods and processes, decision criteria, and other information necessary for external review. The EQAA also has specifications on the characteristics, selection and training of reviewers. The EQAA's system must ensure that each institution or program will be evaluated in an equivalent way, even if the external panels, teams, or committees (together, the "external panels") are different.

The system ensures that:

- The external reviewers meet the EQAA specifications, and the external reviewers are adequate to the tasks to be accomplished.
- External reviewers have no conflicts of interest.
- External reviewers receive necessary training
- External reviewers' reports are evidence-based and clear, with precisely stated conclusions.

When practicable, the EQAA should include at least one external reviewer from another country or jurisdiction in the external panel.

Examples of Sources of Evidence:

- Evaluation/assessment frameworks and criteria
- Proof of adherence to internationally accepted guidelines and conventions
- Legal frameworks, procedures, forms, or documents (e.g. codes of ethics used to avoid conflicts of interest)
- Criteria for the selection, appointment, and training of experts
- Procedures for nomination and appointment of experts
- Manuals or guidelines including instructions for experts and/or institutions
- Protocols
- Description of division of responsibility between the EQAA staff and the external panel

9. Decisions

The EQAA evaluations address both the higher education institution's own self-assessment and external reference points, such as judgments by knowledgeable peers or relevant legislation. An EQAA must be independent, i.e. it has autonomous responsibility for its operations, and its judgments cannot be influenced by third parties. The EQAA's decisions must be impartial, rigorous, thorough, fair, and consistent, even if the judgments are made by different panels. Consistency in decision-making includes consistency and transparency in processes and actions for imposing recommendations for follow-up action. The EQAA's reported decisions are clear and precise.

When the EQAA advises the government or other public bodies, the decisions made by each agency should be made as independently as practicable.

Examples of Sources of Evidence:

- Representative samples of decisions for similar higher education institutions
- Relevant portions of internal and external reviews of the EQAA
- Description of number and types of appeals filed
- Minutes from Council/Board/Committee meetings where the reports were discussed

10. Appeals

The EQAA has appropriate methods and policies for appeals. Appeals should be conducted by reviewers who were not responsible for the original decision and who have no conflict of interest, but appeals need not necessarily be conducted outside the EQAA.

Examples of Sources of Evidence:

- Policy and procedures of appeal

- Conflict of interest policy
- Statistics over a multi-year period, eg the number of appeals, number granted, number denied

SECTION IV. EXTERNAL ACTIVITIES: COLLABORATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES AND TRANSNATIONAL/CROSS-BORDER EDUCATION

11. Collaboration

The EQAA collaborates with other EQAAs, if possible, in areas such as exchange of good practices, capacity building, review of decisions, provision of transnational education, joint projects, and staff exchanges.

Examples of Sources of Evidence:

- Descriptions of meetings and visits to and from other EQAAs
- Statistics on volume and frequency of contacts in either form
- Record of participation in regional networks
- Staff exchanges
- Written agreements between agencies resolving specific issues
- Participation in projects, conferences, and workshops
- Membership in networks/organisations

12. Transnational/Cross-Border Higher Education

The EQAA has policies relating to both imported and exported higher education. These policies may be the same as those for domestic providers and domestic provision. In formulating its policies and practices, the EQAA should consider relevant guidelines issued by international agencies and other associations. All EQAAs should consult with appropriate local agencies in the exporting or importing countries, although this might not be possible or appropriate in situations such as those involving distance learning or small enrollment.

Examples of Sources of Evidence:

- Statements of policies and procedures
- Documents relating to quality assurance review of exported and imported education
- Description of meetings and visits to and from other agencies
- Minutes of meetings of policy-making bodies reflecting consideration of relevant international guidelines.