

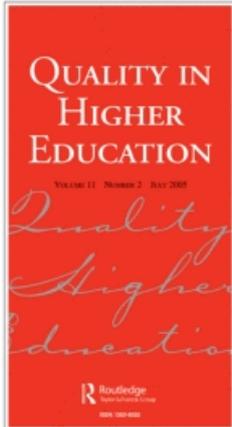
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Guidelines of Good Practice

International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education*^[1]

Introduction

While it is believed that the *Guidelines* will be of interest to all those who are concerned with quality assurance in higher education, they are specifically addressed to quality and assurance agencies who will be referred to in this statement as external quality assurance agencies (EQAAs).

The overarching purpose of the *Guidelines* is to promote good practice in external quality assurance and its aims can be expressed more specifically as follows.

- To promote professional development among EQAAs and their staff.
- To be used as part of the criteria in the self and external evaluation of EQAAs.
- To use as a framework to guide the construction of a new EQAA.
- To promote the public accountability of EQAAs.

The Basic Conditions for the *Guidelines of Good Practice*

When reading and working with the *Guidelines of Good Practice* the following should be taken into consideration:

- The *Guidelines* are intended to promote good practice and assist an agency in improving its quality by building on existing experiences.
- That each EQAA has evolved to serve a specific context and that this is influenced by its cultural and historical context.
- That there exist a diversity of approaches to, and purposes for, external quality evaluation (for example, but not restricted to accreditation, assessment and audit), but that these approaches can be underpinned by some common agreed principles. (The words 'evaluation' or 'EQAA' will be used as generic terms to include all types of external quality checking.)

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- The *Guidelines* should not lead to the dominance of one specific view or approach but promote good practice, while helping to eradicate the bad.

The *Guidelines of Good Practice*

1. The Objectives of the Agency

The EQAA has a written mission statement or set of objectives that takes into account the cultural and historical context of the agency. The statement makes clear that external quality assurance 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 statement of objectives is translated into a clear policy or management plan.

Examples of sources of evidence:

- Written mission statement or set of objectives.
- Policy or strategy of the agency.
- Management plan.
- Legislation.

2. The Relationship Between the EQAA and the Higher Education Institutions

The EQAA:

- Recognises that quality and quality assurance are primarily the responsibility of the higher education institutions themselves.
- Respects the academic autonomy, identity and integrity of the institution.
- Applies standards, which have been subject to consultation with stakeholders.
- Aims to contribute to both quality improvement and accountability.

Examples of sources of evidence:

- Policies or manuals.
- Feedback from institutions and other stakeholders.
- Reports from external reviews of the EQAA.
- EQAA self-reviews.

3. Decision-making

The EQAA carries out its evaluations in relation both to the higher education institution's own self-assessment and to external reference points. An EQAA is independent to the extent that it has autonomous responsibility for its operations and that the judgements made in its reports cannot be influenced by third parties. The agency evinces independent, impartial, rigorous, thorough, fair and consistent decision-making. The agency makes consistent decisions, even if the judgements are formed by different groups, panels, teams or committees.

Examples of sources of evidence:

- Manuals including instructions for experts.
- Criteria for the selection, appointment and training of experts.

- Legal frameworks, procedures, forms, documents, for example, codes of ethics used to avoid conflicts of interest.
- Assessment frameworks and criteria.

4. *The External Committee*

Where the EQAA uses external panels, teams or committees to carry out the evaluations, the system clearly ensures that:

- The composition of the committee is in accordance with the guidelines applied by the EQAA and adequate to the tasks to be accomplished.
- There are no conflicts of interest.
- The committee is instructed clearly about the task.
- The committee acts independently when making its judgements, conclusions or recommendations.

Examples of sources of evidence:

- Procedures for nomination and appointment of experts, including the criteria applied.
- Methods of, and material used for, briefing and training of experts.
- Description of division of labour between the agency staff and the external panel/team/committee.

5. *The Public Face*

In its work, the EQAA informs and responds to the public in accordance with the legislation or cultural context relating to the agency. This includes making public and explicit its documentation, for example, policies, procedures and criteria.

The agency also demonstrates public accountability by reporting openly on its review decisions and making the outcomes of the evaluation public in a way appropriate to the relevant country legislation and the type of review undertaken. The content of the public report may differ depending on the cultural context and will also depend on the requirements set for accountability.

Examples of sources of evidence:

- URL address to 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, for example, email service, newsletter.

6. *Documentation*

The EQAA has clear documentation concerning the self-evaluation and the external evaluation and:

- The documentation concerning the self-evaluation indicates to the institutions of higher education the purposes, procedures and expectations of content in connection with the self-evaluation process. The documentation should distinguish clearly between recommendations and requirements.
- The documentation for external evaluation sets out the matters covered in these *Guidelines of Good Practice*, such as the standards used, the decision criteria, the assessment methods, the reporting format, etc. 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 equality of treatment.
- The documents indicate clearly what the EQAA expects from the institution. Those expectations are appropriate for an institution of higher education or its core activities.
- The documents for EQAA present clearly that the framework will assure that each institution or part of it (for example, subject area) will be evaluated in an equivalent way, even if the external review panels are different.

Examples of sources of evidence:

- Manuals or guidelines including instructions for experts and/or institutions.
- Protocols.
- Evaluation frameworks.
- Proof of adherence to internationally-accepted guidelines and conventions.

7. Resources

The EQAA has adequate and accessible resources, both human and financial, to be able to organise and run the process of external evaluation, in an effective and efficient manner in accordance with the mission statement and the chosen methodological approach and with appropriate provision for development.

Examples of sources of evidence:

- Budget.
- Accounts.
- Activities, tasks, workloads.
- Fee structure.
- Fees for experts.
- Average cost of external review.
- Human resources profile. (Board, or equivalent/external committee members/staff: numbers and qualifications.)

8. System of Appeal

The EQAA has appropriate methods and policies for appeals. While it is essential that appeals should be conducted by those who were not responsible for the original decision, appeals need not necessarily be conducted outside the agency.

Examples of sources of evidence:

- Policy and procedures of appeal.
- Statistics over a five-year period, including, for example, the number of appeals, number of appeals granted and denied.

9. *Quality Assurance of the EQAA*

The EQAA has a system of continuous quality assurance of its own activities, emphasising flexibility (in response to the changing nature of higher education), the effectiveness of its operations and its contribution towards quality improvement.

The agency carries out self-review of its activities, for example, based on data collected and analysis, including consideration of its own effects and value. The agency is subject to external reviews at regular intervals and there is evidence that the results are used.

Examples of sources of evidence:

- Quality assurance policy, system, activities or plan.
- Former self reviews.
- Reports from external reviews.
- Examples of follow-up activities to the continuous quality assurance activities.
- Internal feedback (board or equivalent/external committee/staff).
- External feedback from institutions or other stakeholders.

10. *Collaboration With Other Agencies*

As far as possible, the EQAA collaborates with other such agencies, for example, about the exchange of good practice, review decisions, providers of transnational education, joint projects, staff exchanges.

Examples of sources of evidence:

- Account of meetings and visits to and from other agencies.
- Record of participation in regional networks
- Staff exchanges.
- Written contact between agencies on the solution of specific issues.
- Participation in projects, conferences and workshops.
- Membership of networks or organisations.

11. *Transnational Higher Education*

The agency should have policies relating to both imported and exported higher education, which may treat them in the same way as domestic providers and domestic provision. In formulating its policies and practices the agency should take cognisance of relevant guidelines issued by international agencies and other associations. All agencies should consult with their counterparts in the exporting or importing countries, although it is recognised that in the case of distance education this might not be possible or appropriate especially when only a small number of students are involved.

Examples of sources of evidence:

- Statements of policies and procedures.
- Documents relating to quality assurance review of, where relevant, exported and imported education.
- Account of meetings and visits to and from other agencies.
- Minutes of meetings of the relevant policy-making bodies that indicate that attention has been paid to relevant guidelines such as the *UNESCO/OECD Guidelines*.

Notes

- [1] The original *Guidelines of Good Practice* were published in 2003, this revised edition of the *Guidelines* is an important document. It is the result of discussions and consultation involving representatives of over 65 countries. It is the work of quality assurance agencies 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 life chances of people young and old in all continents and regions. The INQAAHE board wishes to thank all those who have participated in the preparation of the guidelines but would particularly like to thank Marie Jose LeMaitre, Dorte Kristoffersen and Prem Naidoo who acted as the conveners of the working group. Prem made a substantial contribution to the development of the *Guidelines of Good Practice* before his sad and untimely death in February 2006. These guidelines are published in his memory.