

ENQA Code of Conduct for review experts

I. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Code of Conduct

In order to be granted Full Membership or to be reconfirmed as Full member of ENQA, Quality Assurance (QA) agencies are required to successfully undergo an external review every five years. External reviews of agencies undertaken by ENQA are designed principally to test compliance with the ENQA membership criteria and thereby the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher education Area (ESG).

ENQA coordinates external reviews of ENQA member agencies where reviews cannot be initiated and coordinated nationally by national bodies or where an agency so requests.

In doing so, ENQA has a responsibility to ensure that all review reports presented to its consideration are prepared to the highest achievable standards. This means that all experts involved in the review process should manifest integrity and follow the principles of good review practice. With the present Code of Conduct, ENQA aims to ensure ethical and responsible conduct by experts in undertaking reviews.

This Code of Conduct (the “Code”) describes rules of good behaviour relating to the agencies’ external review procedure, and more particularly to the conduct of the site visit. It is intended to assist all Review Panel members, including the Chairs and Secretaries, by providing general guidance on the expected standards of good behaviour and defining more specifically the experts’ responsibilities.

The Code intends to address issues pertaining to the proper conduct of site visits. It cannot be exhaustive and is not intended to cover every possible situation which may arise and all activities of each review panel member.

The present Code is intended to be used in external reviews coordinated by ENQA. The Board of ENQA recommends using this Code in external reviews of ENQA member agencies conducted at national level.

1.2 Application

ENQA has elaborated the present Code of Conduct in order to address questions and concerns as to what constitutes professional and ethical conduct in external reviews.

This Code applies to Review Chairs, Review Secretaries and regular members of the Review Panel appointed to perform external reviews of QA agencies coordinated at national or international level.

The Code is to be viewed as the minimum principles with which reviewers should comply and experts are expected to conduct reviews within the spirit of the Code. In case of any doubt concerning the applicability of a particular section of the Code, experts should be in contact with the ENQA Secretariat.

ENQA expects that all review experts involved in an ENQA coordinated review are familiar with and adhere to the Code and its contents, and commit themselves to respect the rules contained in this document. Upon signature of their review contract, all experts are required to sign a document indicating that they accept the present Code of Conduct. ENQA recommends that all review experts involved in a nationally coordinated review are familiar with and adhere to the Code and its contents, and commit themselves to respect the rules contained in this document.

The Code is available on the ENQA website at www.enqa.eu/reviews_principles.lasso.

Any evidence concerning a serious breach of the Code or unprofessional conduct not mentioned in this Code may lead to an immediate termination of an expert's contract in the review and prohibition to perform future reviews in the subordination of ENQA. The debarred expert will be replaced by another expert where possible. An alleged breach of this Code or any unprofessional conduct not mentioned in this Code will be handled by the ENQA Board on a case-by-case basis.

1.3 Terminology

For the purposes of this Code:

"Confidential Information" means information that was obtained as a consequence of conducting the review and that is not publicly available. Confidential Information includes any information (financial, legal, etc.) that the Agency treats as confidential.

"Integrity" means acting honestly and ethically, being objective and maintaining independence.

"Conflict of interest" means the following: (1) a "real conflict of interest" means that the expert has personal or organisational interests which might influence the performance of its review duties and responsibilities; (2) an "apparent conflict of interest" means any situation where it can be reasonably perceived that the expert's private interests might influence the performance of its duties and responsibilities. A review panel member who has worked in the agency under review within the last five years constitutes an example of conflict of interest.

"Misconduct" means an intentional or negligent failure to observe the rules of conduct set by this Code. There is misconduct when an expert has engaged in unprofessional or incompetent conduct.

This Code has been prepared in acknowledgement of similar codes of conduct and good practice from stakeholders.

II. Code of Conduct

A. Reviewers' duties

In the conduct of all external reviews, all members of the Review Panel are at all times required to observe the following general principles and to conduct themselves in a manner does not bring ENQA into disrepute.

Confidentiality and discretion

- Safeguard all information made available to you, especially communication containing details of a personal nature, in strictest confidence.
- Exercise maximum discretion with regard to all matters relating to the review, in particular in disclosing to anyone external to the panel any confidential information acquired during the review process.
- Do not disclose any information concerning the evaluation procedure without the written approval from the ENQA Secretariat.

Conflict of interest

- Act with strict impartiality and objectivity.
- Identify and declare any real or apparent conflict between your personal interests, whether direct or indirect, and ENQA's interests.
- In the case of an actual conflict, notify ENQA in writing and do not participate further in any processes related to the review in question.
- Inform ENQA immediately of any changes in or additions to the interests already disclosed which occur during the term of your contract.
- In case of doubt as to whether a conflict exists, refer the matter to the ENQA Secretariat for guidance.

Integrity

- Be honest and act with propriety and accountability when conducting the review.
- (Review Secretary) Report any cost or timescale overruns as they become manifest.
- Do not offer or accept under no circumstances any undue reward or extra attention. If you are experiencing or witnessing such an offer, report the incident to the ENQA Secretariat immediately.
- All review experts must refrain from any form of review misconduct. Report to the ENQA Secretariat a breach of this Code in writing, when you know or suspect that a review panel member or a member of the agency's staff has engaged in misconduct.

Finances

- Follow the ENQA financial guidelines, practice economy in the use of resources and ensure that the review runs within its allocated budget.
- (Review Secretary) Carry out the practical (travel, etc.) arrangements of the site visit in good time before the visit to ensure availability of accommodation/meeting facilities and to ensure economical prices.

B. Principles of good practice

ENQA encourages all Review Panel members to adhere to the following Principles of good practice in carrying out their work.

Openness and cooperation

- Be as open and clear as possible in the discussions you have with the agency and other stakeholders during the site visit.
- Always crosscheck and question the findings and evidence received.
- Be tolerant and courteous in all your dealings with agency's staff and stakeholders.
- Respect the varied cultures and backgrounds of each participant in the review process.
- Respect and contribute to establishing a good and productive working environment, in which each panel member is an equal partner, takes responsibility, shows commitment and cooperates.
- (Review Chair) Always exercise your authority in a fair and responsible manner.

Communication

- During meetings, ask questions in a friendly, constructive manner. Remember to remain critical.
- Raise concrete questions and avoid personal questions.
- (Review Chair) Ensure that the views of all participants are valued and taken into the account and foster open exchange of opinions.
- (Review Chair) At the end of each meeting, recapitulate the main topics covered in the discussion in order to make sure that all issues have been brought to debate and thank all participants for their contribution.
- (Review Chair) Make sure that there are no unsettled issues or questions by the end of every meeting and by the end of the review process.
- (Review Secretary) Ensure that everyone in the agency, especially those having low English skills, feel comfortable during meetings with the Review panel.

Commitment to competency and professionalism

- Exercise and maintain professional competence at all times.

- Dress appropriately throughout the review.
- Do not deliberately withhold information in your possession unless it is confidential information.
- Participate only in assignments which you are qualified and competent to perform. If you consider yourself to be insufficiently expert to properly conduct the review, make this clear to the ENQA Secretariat in writing.
- Be well prepared in advance for meetings (examine the documentation provided by the Agency thoroughly and any other information available prior to the site visit, get information on the interviewees, etc.).
- (Review Chair) Keep the time schedule.
- Give full attention to the meetings (turn off mobile phones, etc.).
- Do not debate with other Panel members during meetings, an agreement should be reached beforehand.
- Participate in all meetings and discussions.
- Take notes at the meetings attended and the Panel's private discussions.