

[Agency XX] review report scrutiny form

Completed by Review Committee:

Template A – Recommendation to the ENQA Board

Summary analysis of the final report	
<i>Summary of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the final report in terms of:</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Integrity of the review process and quality of the report - Compliance with ESG 	
Recommendation to the Board	
	To grant/renew Membership
	To request further information in relation to the findings outlined above
	The final report provides sufficient evidence to conclude that the agency does not adequately comply with the ESG . To reject the application and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I) (In case of new applicants) give recommendations and outline areas to be addressed before a new review may be carried out (usually not earlier than after 2 years). II) (In case of current members) recommend to make the necessary changes to reach a sufficient level of compliance with the ESG and undergo an additional partial review to verify progress (within 2 years).
	The final report and/or the review itself does not provide enough evidence to draw conclusions on the agency's compliance with the majority of the ESG standards. Full membership is not granted/renewed and the review should be rejected as unacceptable .
Comments on the recommendation	

Template B – Findings

Analysis of the final review report

I. Integrity of the review process and quality of the report

Has the review been conducted in accordance with the Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews?

Yes No

If not, what shortcomings have you identified?

Comments:

Do all parts of the expert review report provide sufficient, clear and verified information/evidence to support the conclusions?

Yes No

If not, what shortcomings have you identified?

Comments:

Have you identified any discrepancy between the panel's conclusions and the evidence brought forward in its report?

Yes No

If yes, which conclusions are divergent from the evidence?

Comments:

II. Compliance with the ESG

The findings are structured in accordance with the Parts 2 and 3 of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education (ESG) as adopted by the European Ministers in charge of higher education in Yerevan in 2015. Each standard is followed by guidelines (in italics) which provide additional information about good practice and explain in more detail the meaning and importance of the standard. Although the guidelines are not part of the standards themselves, the standards should be considered in conjunction with them.

For each standard, please indicate whether you are in agreement with the panel about their analysis and conclusion. If not, please indicate which level of compliance you think would be more adequate and explain why.

The current Guidelines for ENQA Agency Reviews provide that the levels of compliance are:

Fully compliant: the Agency is **entirely in accordance** with the ESG standard, which is implemented in an effective manner.

Substantially compliant: the Agency is **to a large extent** in accordance with the ESG standard, the **principle/spirit** of which is followed in practice.

Partially compliant: **some aspects** or parts of the ESG standard are met while others are not. The interpretation of the ESG standard is correct, but the manner of implementation is not effective enough.

Non-compliant: the Agency **fails to comply** with the ESG standard.

Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance (ESG 3.1)

“Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.”

To ensure the meaningfulness of external quality assurance, it is important that institutions and the public trust agencies.

Therefore, the goals and objectives of the quality assurance activities are described and published along with the nature of interaction between the agencies and relevant stakeholders in higher education, especially the higher education institutions, and the scope of the agencies’ work. The expertise in the agency may be increased by including international members in agency committees.

A variety of external quality assurance activities are carried out by agencies to achieve different objectives. Among them are evaluation, review, audit, assessment, accreditation or other similar activities at programme or institutional level that may be carried out differently. When the agencies also carry out other activities, a clear distinction between external quality assurance and their other fields of work is needed.

Panel’s judgement on compliance:

Your judgement:

Comments:

Official status (ESG 3.2)

“Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognised as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.”

In particular when external quality assurance is carried out for regulatory purposes, institutions need to have the security that the outcomes of this process are accepted within their higher education system, by the state, the stakeholders and the public.

Panel's judgement on compliance:

Your judgement:

Comments:

Independence (ESG 3.3)

"Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence."

Autonomous institutions need independent agencies as counterparts.

In considering the independence of an agency the following are important:

- *Organisational independence, demonstrated by official documentation (e.g. instruments of government, legislative acts or statutes of the organisation) that stipulates the independence of the agency's work from third parties, such as higher education institutions, governments and other stakeholder organisations;*
- *Operational independence: the definition and operation of the agency's procedures and methods as well as the nomination and appointment of external experts are undertaken independently from third parties such as higher education institutions, governments and other stakeholders;*
- *Independence of formal outcomes: while experts from relevant stakeholder backgrounds, particularly students, take part in quality assurance processes, the final outcomes of the quality assurance processes remain the responsibility of the agency.*

Anyone contributing to external quality assurance activities of an agency (e.g. as expert) is informed that while they may be nominated by a third party, they are acting in a personal capacity and not representing their constituent organisations when working for the agency. Independence is important to ensure that any procedures and decisions are solely based on expertise.

Panel's judgement on compliance:

Your judgement:

Comments:

Thematic analysis (ESG 3.4)

“Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.”

In the course of their work, agencies gain information on programmes and institutions that can be useful beyond the scope of a single process, providing material for structured analyses across the higher education system. These findings can contribute to the reflection on and the improvement of quality assurance policies and processes in institutional, national and international contexts.

A thorough and careful analysis of this information will show developments, trends and areas of good practice or persistent difficulty.

Panel’s judgement on compliance:

Your judgement:

Comments:

Resources (ESG 3.5)

“Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.”

It is in the public interest that agencies are adequately and appropriately funded, given higher education’s important impact on the development of societies and individuals. The resources of the agencies enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance activities in an effective and efficient manner. Furthermore, the resources enable the agencies to improve, to reflect on their practice and to inform the public about their activities.

Panel’s judgement on compliance:

Your judgement:

Comments:

Internal quality assurance and professional conduct (ESG 3.6)

“Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.”

Agencies need to be accountable to their stakeholders. Therefore, high professional standards and integrity in the agency’s work are indispensable. The review and improvement of their activities are on-going so as to ensure that their services to institutions and society are optimal.

Agencies apply an internal quality assurance policy which is available on its website. This policy

- *ensures that all persons involved in its activities are competent and act professionally and ethically;*
- *includes internal and external feedback mechanisms that lead to a continuous improvement within the agency;*
- *guards against intolerance of any kind or discrimination;*
- *outlines the appropriate communication with the relevant authorities of those jurisdictions where they operate;*
- *ensures that any activities carried out and material produced by subcontractors are in line with the ESG, if some or all of the elements in its quality assurance activities are subcontracted to other parties;*
- *allows the agency to establish the status and recognition of the institutions with which it conducts external quality assurance.*

Panel’s judgement on compliance:

Your judgement:

Comments:

Cyclical external review of agencies (ESG 3.7)

“Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.”

A periodic external review will help the agency to reflect on its policies and activities. It provides a means for assuring the agency and its stakeholders that it continues to adhere to the principles enshrined in the ESG.

Panel’s judgement on compliance:

Your judgement:

Comments:

Consideration of internal quality assurance (ESG 2.1)

“External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.”

Quality assurance in higher education is based on the institutions’ responsibility for the quality of their programmes and other provision; therefore it is important that external quality assurance recognises and supports institutional responsibility for quality assurance. To ensure the link between internal and external quality assurance, external quality assurance includes consideration of the standards of Part 1. These may be addressed differently, depending on the type of external quality assurance.

Panel’s judgement on compliance:

Your judgement:

Comments:

Designing methodologies fit for purpose (ESG 2.2)

“External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.”

In order to ensure effectiveness and objectivity it is vital for external quality assurance to have clear aims agreed by stakeholders.

The aims, objectives and implementation of the processes will

- *bear in mind the level of workload and cost that they will place on institutions;*
- *take into account the need to support institutions to improve quality;*
- *allow institutions to demonstrate this improvement;*
- *result in clear information on the outcomes and the follow-up.*

The system for external quality assurance might operate in a more flexible way if institutions are able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own internal quality assurance.

Panel’s judgement on compliance:

Your judgement:

Comments:

Implementing processes (ESG 2.3)

“External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include

- a self-assessment or equivalent;
- an external assessment normally including a site visit;
- a report resulting from the external assessment;

- a consistent follow-up.”

External quality assurance carried out professionally, consistently and transparently ensures its acceptance and impact.

Depending on the design of the external quality assurance system, the institution provides the basis for the external quality assurance through a self-assessment or by collecting other material including supporting evidence. The written documentation is normally complemented by interviews with stakeholders during a site visit. The findings of the assessment are summarised in a report (cf. Standard 2.5) written by a group of external experts (cf. Standard 2.4).

External quality assurance does not end with the report by the experts. The report provides clear guidance for institutional action. Agencies have a consistent follow-up process for considering the action taken by the institution. The nature of the follow-up will depend on the design of the external quality assurance.

Panel’s judgement on compliance:

Your judgement:

Comments:

Peer-review experts (ESG 2.4)

“External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).”

At the core of external quality assurance is the wide range of expertise provided by peer experts, who contribute to the work of the agency through input from various perspectives, including those of institutions, academics, students and employers/professional practitioners.

In order to ensure the value and consistency of the work of the experts, they

- *are carefully selected;*
- *have appropriate skills and are competent to perform their task;*
- *are supported by appropriate training and/or briefing.*

The agency ensures the independence of the experts by implementing a mechanism of no-conflict-of-interest.

The involvement of international experts in external quality assurance, for example as members of peer panels, is desirable as it adds a further dimension to the development and implementation of processes.

Panel’s judgement on compliance:

Your judgement:

Comments:

Criteria for outcomes (ESG 2.5)

“Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.”

External quality assurance and in particular its outcomes have a significant impact on institutions and programmes that are evaluated and judged.

In the interests of equity and reliability, outcomes of external quality assurance are based on pre-defined and published criteria, which are interpreted consistently and are evidence-based. Depending on the external quality assurance system, outcomes may take different forms, for example, recommendations, judgements or formal decisions.

Panel’s judgement on compliance:

Your judgement:

Comments:

Reporting (ESG 2.6)

“Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.”

The report by the experts is the basis for the institution’s follow-up action of the external evaluation and it provides information to society regarding the activities of an institution. In order for the report to be used as the basis for action to be taken, it needs to be clear and concise in its structure and language and to cover

- *context description (to help locate the higher education institution in its specific context);*
- *description of the individual procedure, including experts involved;*
- *evidence, analysis and findings;*
- *conclusions;*
- *features of good practice, demonstrated by the institution;*
- *recommendations for follow-up action.*

The preparation of a summary report may be useful.

The factual accuracy of a report is improved if the institution is given the opportunity to

point out errors of fact before the report is finalised.

Panel's judgement on compliance:

Your judgement:

Comments:

Complaints and appeals (ESG 2.7)

“Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.”

In order to safeguard the rights of the institutions and ensure fair decision-making, external quality assurance is operated in an open and accountable way. Nevertheless, there may be misapprehensions or instances of dissatisfaction about the process or formal outcomes.

Institutions need to have access to processes that allow them to raise issues of concern with the agency; the agencies, need to handle such issues in a professional way by means of a clearly defined process that is consistently applied.

A complaints procedure allows an institution to state its dissatisfaction about the conduct of the process or those carrying it out.

In an appeals procedure, the institution questions the formal outcomes of the process, where it can demonstrate that the outcome is not based on sound evidence, that criteria have not been correctly applied or that the processes have not been consistently implemented.

Panel's judgement on compliance:

Your judgement:

Comments: