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Guidelines for national reviews  
of ENQA member agencies



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## 1. Introduction

The membership regulations of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) require all member agencies to undergo an external review at least once every five years. External reviews are expected to include consideration of how far agencies meet the criteria for Full membership of ENQA. These criteria are identical with the European Standards and Guidelines in Quality Assurance (ESG) in the European Higher Education Area, adopted by ministers in Bergen in 2005.

In line with the principle of subsidiarity which underpins the ESG, the five-yearly reviews will normally be conducted at national level.

## 2. Organisation of reviews

### National reviews

External reviews of ENQA member agencies will normally be initiated and coordinated by national authorities, as part of their routine quality assurance arrangements. These guidelines are intended to help members ensure that their national reviews will produce the information needed to satisfy the requirements of ENQA membership. The guidelines build on the theoretical model presented in the annex to the ESG.

### ENQA co-ordinated reviews

ENQA itself has only limited resources to co-ordinate reviews. There may, however, be instances where it is not appropriate or not possible for the review to be organised at a national level; for example where there is no suitable or willing national body to co-ordinate the review. Agencies wishing to engage ENQA to conduct their review must be able to justify why a national review would not be appropriate or possible. ENQA reserves the right to decline to coordinate an agency's five-yearly external review.

Guidance on the procedures and processes of ENQA co-ordinated external reviews of member agencies are available from the Secretariat.

## 3. Remit of the review

There are likely to be two types of nationally co-ordinated external review:

- a) a review whose sole purpose is to fulfil the periodic external review requirement of ENQA membership; and
- b) a review which has a number of purposes, one of which is to fulfil the periodic external review requirement of ENQA membership.

#### **4. Key features of the review**

Certain elements will be required in a national review for it to be acceptable to the ENQA Board as a vehicle for demonstrating that the agency has met the Full membership criteria.

- the management of the review process must be completely independent of the agency itself;
- all parts of the of the review's management and process must be transparent and therefore easily open to examination by the ENQA Board;
- the report produced must be sufficiently detailed to provide satisfactory assurance for the ENQA Board of the robustness of the review;
- the report must provide sufficient, verified, information which clearly shows that the ENQA membership criteria have been met.

The review will generally consist of six phases – these are outlined below with a commentary on key features that lend themselves to the fulfilment of the above requirements.

##### **I. Notification to ENQA**

As soon as a member agency knows that a national review is to take place it should inform the ENQA Secretariat. The Secretariat should be provided with the identity and contact details of the body co-ordinating the review and vice versa.

Although the review is being conducted on a national level it is advisable that ENQA should be kept informed of progress throughout the review, no matter whether it is of type (a) or (b). This is both to enable the Board to plan its workload and to help ensure that the outcomes of the review process meet the requirements of the ENQA Board in assessing compliance with membership criteria.

##### **II. Formulation of terms of reference and protocol for the review**

The terms of reference for the review should be drafted well before the process starts – and should clearly identify whether the review is intended to be a type (a) or type (b) evaluation. They should also state clearly the relationship of the review to the ENQA membership criteria.

An outline of how the review is going to run – number of reviewers, administrative arrangements, approximate timings etc – should also be clearly stated.

### **III. Nomination and appointment of a panel of reviewers**

There is no single ideal model for the composition of a review panel. The key requirements, however, are that members of the panel should be totally independent of the agency under review and have a sufficient level of knowledge, experience and expertise to conduct the review to a high standard.

A review panel will be able to perform its independent function most successfully when it comprises members who between them have a wide range of professional experience of higher education and quality assurance; this might well include:

- quality assurance experts from outside the system being reviewed;
- representatives of higher education institutions;
- student members;
- stakeholder members (for example, an employer).

International member(s) on the panel can provide very valuable insights for the review and help to establish its credibility, and it is therefore recommended that at least one member of the panel should be a quality assurance expert from beyond the jurisdiction of the agency under review.

The review panel should include a member who will act as secretary to the review.

No current or recent former member of staff of the agency under review should take part in the review panel or act as secretary to the review.

Nominations of experts could be sought from a wide range of sources – including agencies, stakeholders, local authorities, etc. – but the selection process must be carried out by a third party (ie, not by the agency being reviewed), to preserve the integrity of the process.

### **IV. Production of a self-evaluation report by the agency under review**

The exact form and content of the self-evaluation report is something which will need to be negotiated between the panel and the agency under review. As, however, the self-evaluation report normally provides a substantial portion of the evidence which

the panel will draw on in forming its conclusions, it is important that the report is both full, frank and that its contents can be corroborated by documentary and/or oral evidence.

The Annex to the ESG gives a detailed account of what might be included in the self-evaluation report of an agency undergoing an external review. This suggests that it is likely to be useful for a self-evaluation to contain:

- a brief outline of the national higher education system, the history of the particular agency and of the evaluation of higher education in general;
- evidence of the external quality assurance undertaken by the agency;
- details of the evaluation method applied by the agency including: the elements of the methodology; an account of the role of the external expert group; documentation of the agency's processes and procedures;
- details of the system of appeal;
- details of the agency's own internal quality assurance procedures;
- information and opinions on the agency from its key stakeholders.

#### **V. A site-visit by the panel of reviewers to the agency under review**

The details of the duration and schedule of the site visit may vary between reviews and may depend on whether the review is a type (a) or type (b). The length of the visit should be determined at the beginning of the review process when terms and conditions are being decided upon.

It is likely that a visit duration of at least two days will be necessary for a review panel to validate fully the self-evaluation and clarify any points at issue.

## **VI. Production and publication of a final report**

It is essential that before publication the agency under review is provided with a copy of the draft report and sufficient time to check its contents for errors of fact.

Also see section five, below.

### **5. Key features of the report**

The form of the review panel's report is likely to depend on the type of review that has been carried out.

#### **Type A**

Where the sole purpose of the review is the fulfilment of ENQA's membership requirements, the report should be clearly structured with this end in mind. Each membership criterion should be discussed separately.

To assist the ENQA Board to reach a sound conclusion, it is necessary for the report to include more than just a statement of compliance (or partial or non-compliance) for each criterion under scrutiny.

For each criterion, therefore, it is necessary to include:

- a summary of the evidence gathered
- an analysis of how far, based on the evidence available, the agency does (or does not) meet the criterion
- a summative conclusion stating whether the agency is fully or substantially compliant; partially compliant; or non-compliant.

Where an agency is found to be either partially compliant or non-compliant with a criterion, the reason for this should be explained. Full or substantial compliance may be impossible for some agencies, owing to restrictions placed on them by the very nature of their work and/or legislation in place in their country(ies) of operation. When considering such cases, the ENQA Board will take mitigating circumstances such as these into account.

### **Type B**

Where a review has a wider purpose, it is recommended that the report should nevertheless include a full chapter which deals specifically with the ENQA membership criteria, written in the same manner as has been described above for type (a) reviews.

This would then provide the primary source of reference for the ENQA Board when forming its conclusions. The full report should still, however, be submitted for consideration.

### **Further characteristics for reports type A and B**

It would be useful for all reports also to include the following information:

- an executive summary (including an overall conclusion regarding compliance with the ENQA membership criteria);
- contextual information:
  - reason(s) for the commissioning of the review;
  - the place of the agency in the quality assurance structure of its jurisdiction;
  - the main functions of the agency;
  - the engagement of the agency with the ESG;
- the terms of reference of the review;
- the details of the timescale over which the review was conducted;
- the identity of all panel members and administrative support arrangements;
- a description of the main stages of the review;
- any recommendations for improvement.

Key pieces of evidence – i.e. extracts from legislation, policies and procedures etc. – may be added to the report in the form of appendices.

## **6. Consideration of national review reports by ENQA**

ENQA's General Assembly has delegated to its Board consideration of review reports and subsequent decisions in respect of membership. Where possible, the Board will use national reports to reach a conclusion on whether an agency has or has not met the membership criteria. If the report's contents, or the way the review has been conducted, do not, in the Board's opinion, allow it to come to a conclusion, it will decide what additional information it requires. This may comprise further documentary evidence, additional information from the review organisers or the agency itself, or information acquired during a short visit to the review organisers, review panel or agency.

The Board's powers in respect of membership matters, and the rules relating to appeals against a decision of the Board, are contained in paragraphs 3.7 and 4.2.5 of the Regulations of the Association.

Approved by the ENQA Board  
21 September 2006