The INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice 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.

This document, agreed by the INQAAHE General Assembly in Wellington, New Zealand in April, 2005 is offered to the quality assurance and higher education communities and their comments on their implementation will be welcomed by the INQAAHE board. Comments should be sent to Ann Graves at the INQAAHE Secretariat to be received not later than Friday, 26 August, 2005 by e-mail to inqaahe@hetac.ie . The next General Assembly in Toronto in April, 2007 will assess the success of the implementation of these guidelines. In the meantime INQAAHE, through its working group, is keeping these guidelines under review.

The INQAAHE board wishes to thank Dorte Kristoffersen, who convened the working group and the other members of the group, for the work undertaken in the preparation of this document.

Richard Lewis

Richard Lewis
President, INQAAHE

May 2005

GUIDELINES OF GOOD PRACTICE

INTRODUCTION

The initial draft of the Principles of Good Practice for Quality Assurance agencies was proposed to the General Assembly in Dublin in 2003 by a working group of the Board. The Dublin General Assembly decided to:

- Endorse the Principles as a working document but agreed that at this stage it would be more appropriate to describe them as guidelines.
- To commend them to the members of the Network and urge them to consider and apply them with regard to their work.
- To establish a working group which, based on the arguments set out during the meeting and the experience of those members that used them, would develop a more adequate text, to be presented at the workshop in Oman in March 2004.

The Guidelines of Good Practice were discussed again at the INQAAHE workshop in Oman. On the basis of the recommendations of the working group established in Dublin, it was decided to continue improving the wording of the guidelines with the aim of making them more operational and less open to interpretation and to add Examples of sources of evidence needed to prove compliance with the guidelines.

The version of guidelines presented below is the results of the process since Oman.

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 External Quality Assurance (EQA) Agency in improving its quality building on existing experiences.
- That each EQA Agency 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 (e.g. but not restricted to accreditation, assessment and audit), but that these approaches can be underpinned by some common agreed principles. (The words 'evaluation' or 'EQA' will be used as generic terms to include all types of external quality checking.)
- The Guidelines should not lead to the dominance of one specific view or approach, but promote good practices, while helping to eradicate bad quality.

THE GUIDELINES OF GOOD PRACTICE

1.   The Mission statement

The EQA Agency 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 mission statement is translated into a clear policy or management plan.

Examples of sources of evidence:

- Mission statement.
- Policy/strategy of the agency.

- Management plan.
- Legislation.

2.   The relation between the EQA Agency and the higher education institutions

The EQA Agency:

- Recognises that quality and quality assurance are primarily the responsibility of the higher education institutions themselves.
- Respects the 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/manuals.
- Feedback from institutions and other stakeholders.
- Reports from external reviews of the EQA Agency.
- EQA Agency self reviews.

3.   Decision-making

The EQA Agency carries out its evaluations in relation both to the higher education institution's own self-assessment and to external reference points. An EQA agency is independent to the extent that it has autonomous responsibility for its operations and that the judgments 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, e.g. Codes of Ethics used to avoid conflicts of interest.
- Assessment frameworks and criteria.

4.   The external committee

Where the EQA Agency 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 EQA Agency 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 EQA Agency 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 e.g. 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 EQA Agency website and short summary of the types of information provided here.
- List of publications.
- Press releases.
- Other ways and means of informing the public e.g. email service, Newsletter.

6.   Documentation

The EQA Agency 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 EQA Agency expects from the institution. Those expectations are appropriate for an institution of HE or its core activities.
- The documents for EQA present clearly that the framework will assure that each institution or part of it (e.g. 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 EQA Agency 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 in terms of numbers and qualifications.)

8.   System of Appeal

The EQA Agency has an appropriate method for appeals against its decisions.

Examples of sources of evidence:

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

9.   Quality Assurance of the EQA Agency

The EQA Agency has a system of continuous quality assurance of its own activities, emphasising flexibility (in response to the changing nature of higher education) and quality improvements.

The agency carries out self-review of its activities, e.g. 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/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 EQA Agency collaborates with other EQA Agencies, eg. 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.
- Staff exchanges.
- Written contact between agencies on the solution of specific issues.
- Participation in projects, conferences and workshops.
- Membership of networks/organisations.